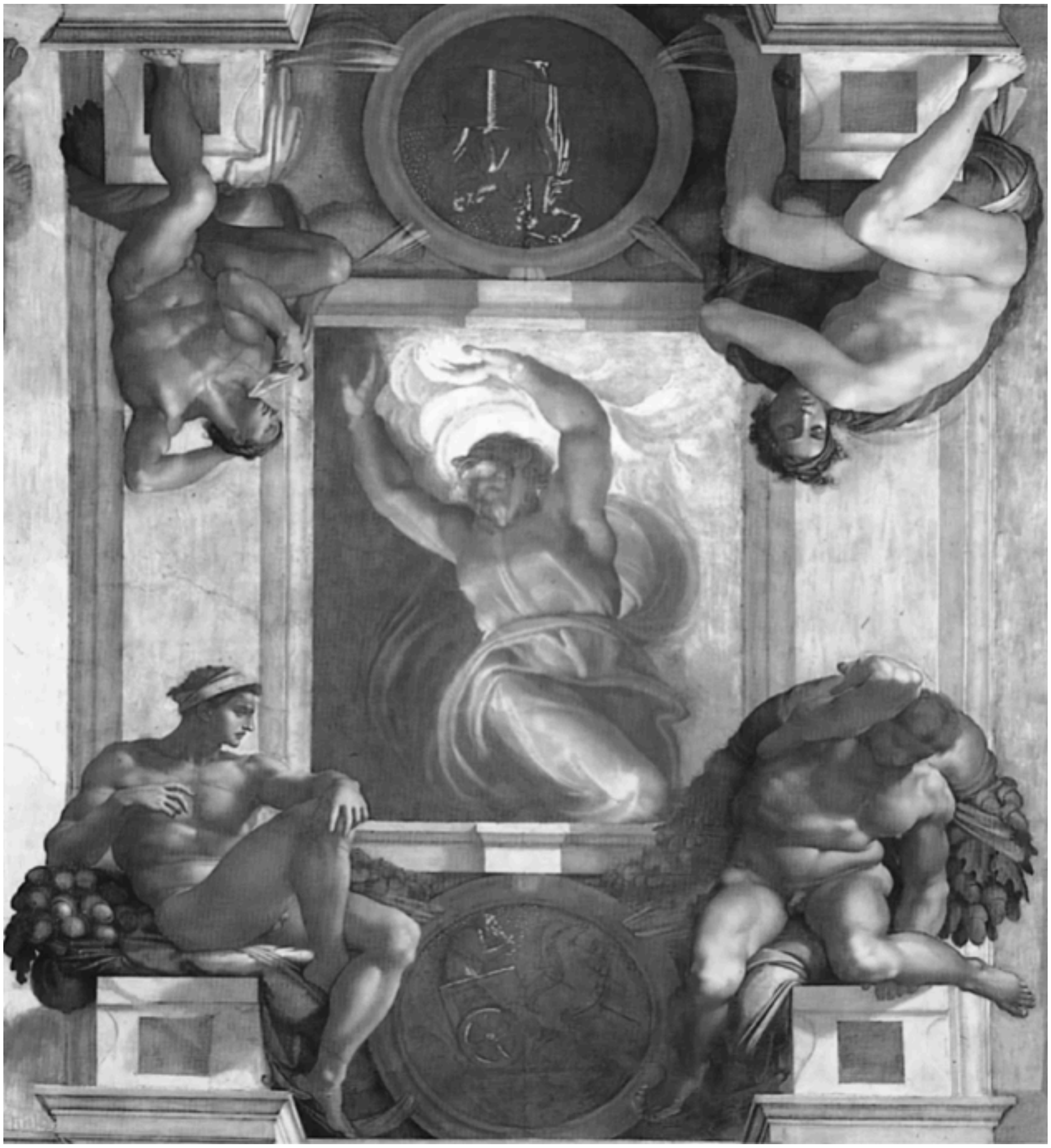

CLASSICAL MALE BEAUTY IN MELVILLE AND WHITMAN

Richard Jackson Guignard Wells

ARGUMENT

This is a work of literary criticism on classical male beauty in the literature of two American poets, Herman Melville (b. 1819–d. 1891) and Walt Whitman (b. 1819–d. 1892). It argues that a dominant theme in these authors' work is a series of allusions to the visual-arts tradition of classical male beauty that wrestles with the American relationship to antiquity.

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INTRODUCTION

In short, this study illuminates the significance of two American poets incorporating imagery of classical male beauty into their literature. The methodology is using literary and historical criticism to argue that Walt Whitman (b. 1819–d. 1892) and Herman Melville (b. 1819–d. 1891) viewed classical male beauty as an ideal. The question studied is, To what extent did Melville and Whitman's ability to artistically appreciate the male form and its aesthetics of physicality determine their literary genius? This dissertation isolates classical male beauty as the primary site of investigation to answer this guiding question.

To discuss classical male beauty, one must discuss the classical artform of the nude. Perhaps the single greatest contributing factor to the classical nude's absence in American art is the iconoclastic attitude in Protestantism as well as the northern climate of the New England colonies. This was James Jackson Jarves' analysis in 1874 in his article "The Nude in Modern Art and Society." Permit me to quote at-length:

> So long as civilisation was mainly confined to the Latin and Greek races, Art had no moral obstacle in its way to using the nude as its supreme manifestation of its loftiest ideas, abstract or otherwise. Hence its most emphatic triumphs, whether under Catholic or classical inspiration, have been wise in the use of the human form as typical of divine attributes. But the tendency of Art in the northern people has been steadily in the opposite direction, relying less on human idealism and more on external nature in its every-day material aspects, until a sturdy, unpoetic realism and the *genre* type of motives have become dominant, both in sculpture and painting. Our model is the superabundantly clothed human being employed in the ordinary avocations

> of a frivolous or laborious existence; our *ideal*, the common-place, or "natural," as we distinctively term any motive which is not absolutely heroic, abstract, poetic, or spiritual. This demand for the familiar and intelligible in the external life around him. He must choose the varying fashions; customs, and facts of the fleeting hour, and correspondingly neglect those permanent types and forms which belong to all men for all time.
>
> Two causes make him drift in this direction. Northern climates require plentiful clothing, so that the human figure is virtually a lost and unrecognised force and fact as regards its inherent beuaty; both in popular knowledge and Art. Æsthetic movement and character are now associated with redundant costume. Any transient disclosure of muscle and outline, unless in the license of high life or the stage, is held to be an infringement of sound morals and offensive to the sight. But the most cogent opposition to the nude in Art is born of religious scruples. Since the Reformation everything of this nature has been put under ban because of its connection with an anathematized paganism or papal idolatry.[1]

Or, in the case of this anonymous writer writing for the *New York Quarterly* in 1852 on the topic of "American Art," the nude was a relic of European civilization that had no relationship to native American characteristics:

> The necessity of choosing subjects which shall receive popular sympathy will at once point out a radical error in all our sculpture,—the abuse of the nude. There is not only

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[1] James Jackson Jarves, "The Nude in Modern Art and Society," *The Art Journal*, vol. 36, March 1874, pp. 65-66.

no desire of, but an absolute disgust with, all such affectation of the antique. Civilized humanity does not run naked in this nineteenth century, and there is no reason why it should be so represented, even in stone; and if a nude statue were labelled from head to foot with the motto of the Garter, it would not remove one particle of the repugnance every delicate and sensitive mind feels at any studied exposure of undraped manhood or womanhood. Any display of the nude, for the sake of nudity, or when not rigidly insisted on by the proprieties of the subject, is meretricious. If the sculptor thinks that the draped figure is too poor for his art, let him take a characteristic type of American manhood—a Western pioneer; for instance—and when he shall have worked into his marble *all* the nobility, the glory of manhood, and energy which the character suggests, if he has not made a work which the world will thank him for, and remember him by forever, then let him spend the remainder of his days in chiseling a Bacchus or an Apollo; which, when done, will feebly suggest the glory of the Greek, or, better still, give up his profession. Is that a less worthy type of manhood than the Gladiator? The Greek must represent the body, not only because he was accustomed to see it at the games and elsewhere more than we, but because, also, he knew nothing of the soul. But to us who do, there is more of beauty and worth in the face than in the whole man to the Greek, and more than in any antique in existence. Here, then, our "ideal" sculpture, with few exceptions, fails in the first requisition from the spirit of the people, in not being practical; it does not respond to their wants. They ask for the embodiment of that they love

> —the artist gives them that they never heard of; they ask for bread, and he gives them a stone.[2]

The last obstacle for classical male beauty in American art was the general decline in modernity for limning the male form in the West. Kenneth Clarke provides a glimpse into this trend:

> The predominance of the female nude over the male, of which Raphael's *Judgment of Paris* [c. 1510] is the first example, was to increase during the next two hundred years, till by the nineteenth century it was absolute. The male nude kept its place in the curriculum of art schools out of piety to the classical ideal, but it was drawn and painted with diminishing enthusiasm, and when we speak of a nude study or *académie* of that period we tend to assume that the subject will be a woman. No doubt this is connected with a declining interest in anatomy (for the *écorché* figure is always male) and so is part of that prolonged episode in the history of art in which the intellectual analysis of parts dissolves before sensuous perception of totalities.[3]

In *The Great American Nude* American art historian William Gerdts deduces three reasons behind the general lack of a classical nude in American art: i. The absence of an artistic tradition based on "the concept of bodily expressiveness and bodily perfection";[4] ii. "The overriding importance of the landscape and frontier in our cultural ethos" has made natural landscapes and not the human body the primary object of aesthetic interest;[5] iii. "The varying degrees of repugnance for European domination of our aesthetic and cultural aspirations" has convinced Americans that the nude is an outdated relic of the Old World.[6]

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[2] The antagonism between paganism and Christianity, a long standing one, is to be observed in American art criticism from the nineteenth-century. In the piece "American Art," published in 1852 in the *New York Quarterly*, an anonymous writer arguing against nudity in art finds that the infinite, Christian soul is best represented through the face while the body, being pagan and implicitly finite, is to be censured by drapery. For these reasons, the writer maintains that portraiture is the quintessential American artform because it reduces bodily identity to the face alone and is conducive to the domestic environment for promoting sound morals. See "American Art," *New-York Quarterly*, vol. 1, no. 2, 1852, pp. 229–51.

[3] See Kenneth Clarke, *The Nude: A Study in Ideal Form* (Double Day Anchor Books, 1956), p. 457.

If the classical nude was left behind, it is fair for to ask, What did American art bring over from Europe? It is a well-known fact among historians that the premier art-form of the colonial period was portrait painting. Done in the manner of Elizabethan-era portraiture, this artform took root in the British colonies and survived as the only commercially viable pathway for the visual artist well into the nineteenth-century.[7] When the daguerreotype appeared in 1839, the portrait grew in popularity as it became fashionable for the average citizen to make their portrait at an affordable price. This heightened focus on portraiture became a point of criticism for Whitman who was drawn more to the classical artform of the nude that the Latin and Greek races had wrought their ideals into. For instance, Whitman wrote in an unpublished manuscript of his that,

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[4] When *art* is invoked in the American imaginary, the average citizen will think of the struggling artist, like Edgar Allan Poe, what the French call the *poète maudit*, or the abstract painters, such as Rothko and Pollock.

[5] Frederick Jackson Turner's frontier thesis about the influence of westward expansion on American identity is relevant here. The Hudson River school of painting, with its awesome displays of nature (e.g., Niagara Falls, the Catskill Mountains), were the first native school of American painting, complementing Turner's ideas. Frederick Jackson Turner, *The Significance of the Frontier in American History* (American Historical Association, 1993).

[6] William H. Gerdts*, The Great American Nude; A History in Art* (New York: Praeger, 1974), p. 9.

[7] The Freake limner is an anonymous colonial painter credited with painting ten portraits of Boston residents from 1670 and 1674. The most famous of these are the two of the Freake family, *John Freake* and *Mrs. John Freake and Baby Mary*. See Wayne Craven, *Colonial American portraiture* (Cambridge UP, 1986), pp. 38–54.

> Prevalent poems cast back only physiognomy. In the following chant, the apparition of the whole form, as of one unclothed before a mirror, is cast back. The teachers of the day teach (and stop there) that the unclothed face is divine. It is indeed; but I say that only the unclothed body, diviner still, is fully divine.[8]

While Melville does not critique physiognomy or portraiture to the degree Whitman does, the frequency of allusions to Greco-Roman statues is a hint toward his classical orientation. The lecture "Statues in Rome" that Melville would give given in various midwestern cities in 1858 after his tour of the Mediterranean is the most concrete piece of evidence we have toward his classicism.[9] Melville, it should be said, is especially fond of the *heroism* that the Greeks and Romans wrought in the nude statues of their heroes and gods. For instance, in *Moby-Dick*, Captain Ahab is compared to Cellini's bronze cast of Perseus: "His whole high, broad form, seemed made of solid bronze, and shaped in an unalterable mould, like Cellini's cast Perseus."[10]

Having provided some context for the study, let us provide the chapter descriptions. Chapter one "Goethe and German

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[8] Clifton Joseph Furness, *Walt Whitman's Workshop: A Collection of Unpublished Manuscripts* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1964), p. 128.

[9] Merton M. Sealts, ed., "Statues in Rome," *Melville as Lecturer* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1957), pp. 127–154.

[10] Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick; or, the Whale* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1851), p. 135.

Neoclassicism in *Moby-Dick*" looks at a passage in Chapter 86 "The Tail" where an allusion is made to Johann Peter Eckermann's *Conversations with Goethe*. Here, Melville references Eckermann's book amidst a constellation of images of antique and renaissance art. This chapter considers classical male beauty from the point of view of Melville's interest in German neoclassicism and its connection to Greco-Roman and Italian renaissance art. Chapter two "The Franco-Italian Baroque in *Pierre*" interprets Melville's second novel as a transatlantic love story. Extended treatment is given to the male nude sculpture of Enceladus in the gardens of Versailles featured prominently in Book XXV. Chapter three "The American Adam in *Leaves of Grass*" turns to the first edition of Walt Whitman's book of poetry to consider the plethora of allusions to classical male beauty. And, finally, in chapter four "Olympian Body and Soul in *Manly Health and Training*," Whitman's treatment of Greek and Roman statues in his health and fitness manual is analyzed. Whitman's search for a definition of classical male beauty is discussed alongside the ancient models and the influence of Greco-Roman antiquity on the early republic.

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GOETHE AND GERMAN NEOCLASSICISM IN *MOBY-DICK*

1.1 As a Roman Triumphal Arch

This chapter will identify a camouflaged allusion to Eckermann's *Conversations with Goethe* that appears in chapter eighty-six "The Tail."[11] By decorating the allusion with even more allusions to art objects found in Italy representing classical male beauty, the passage underscores the importance of antique art and the male form as a dominant theme to Melville's oeuvre. While the chapter starts out ostensibly as an anatomical exposition of the whale's tail, it slowly morphs into a theory of classical male beauty. Let us begin our close reading of chapter eighty-six "The Tail" by looking at the first sentence that highlights the chapter's attitude:

> Other poets have warbled the praises of the soft eye of the antelope, and the lovely plumage of the bird that never alights; less celestial, I celebrate a tail.[12]

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[11] Authors that Melville alludes to are the King James Bible, Shakespeare, Milton, and Ovid. It is quite clear, both from the sheer size of *Moby-Dick* as well as its agonistic theme, that Melville is operating in the Homeric, epic tradition starting with the *Iliad.* The spirit of the agon in Greek literature, as well as the theme of struggle in romanticism, is a crossover between antiquity and nineteenth-century romanticism. It certainly is the glue for Nietzsche's unique blend of classical and romantic themes in his essay "Homer's Contest," trans. Christa Davis Acampora, *Nietzscheana #5* (North American Nietzsche Society, 1996), pp. 1–8.

[12] Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick; or, the Whale* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1851), p. 417.

Perhaps taking a jab at a Keats or Shelley, Melville, being the intellectual boxer that he is, proposes that he will sing of the whale instead of a bird. For this reason, it is important to underscore at the outset that this chapter, nominally on the whale's tail, is not just concerned with marine science nor cetology, but with poetry, aesthetics, beauty, etc., too. It is concerned with what the proper source of poetic inspiration is or, rather, ought to be for the poet. It takes aim at all those sentimental artists who strove to represent dapper gentlemen and elegant ladies dressed to a T—avoiding a poetry made of whale fat. As an artist-anatomist, Melville announces that he will sing of the anterior of the whale's body.[13]

What is most curious about Melville's digression on classical male beauty is the inclusion of Goethe amidst the constellation of art objects found in Italy. Melville's mosaic of classical and renaissance art is, notably, of the male form. The interest in classical male beauty channels the pioneering work of Johann Joachim Winckelmann, the godfather of modern art history, whose writings on visual art, especially classical Greek sculpture, extolled the beauty of the male form.[14] In a notable essay "On the Beautiful in Art," Winckelmann writes,

> I have observed that those who are only aware of beauty in the female sex and are hardly or not at all affected by beauty in our sex, have little innate feeling for beauty in art

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[13] On this matter of the intersection between anatomy and art, see Patricia Lee Rubin, *Seen from Behind: Perspectives on the Male Body and Renaissance Art* (Yale University Press, 2018).

[14] Winckelmann was born into poverty in Stendhal and slowly clawed his way to becoming *Scriptor linguae teutonicae* of the Vatican library and *Prefetto delle Antichità* (Prefect of the Antiquities of Rome). He is considered by many to be the godfather of modern art history due to his influential writings on classical art, including his 1764 *Geschichte der Kunst des Alterthums* (History of the Art of Antiquity). See Wolfgang Leppmann, *Winckelmann* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1970).

> in a general and vital sense. The same people have an inadequate response to the art of the Greeks, since their greatest beauties are more of our sex than the other.[15]

The significance of this for Melville is that he adopts a Grecian attitude for the classical male form.[16] When contemplating the anatomical structure of the whale's tail, we can observe how Melville's mind is triggered into a burst of images depicting classical male beauty in a Winckelmannian vein. The combined beauty and strength of the whale's tail gliding through water shares qualities that classical art unites in its statuary:

> Nor does this—its [the tail's] amazing strength, at all tend to cripple the graceful flexion of its motions; where infantileness of ease undulates through a Titanism of power. On the contrary, those motions derive their most appalling beauty from it. Real strength never impairs beauty or harmony, but it often bestows it; and in everything imposingly beautiful, strength has much to do with the magic. Take away the tied tendons that all over seem bursting from the marble in the carved Hercules, and its charm would be gone. As devout Eckermann lifted the linen sheet from the naked corpse of Goethe, he was

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[15] Johann Joachim Winckelmann, "On the Beautiful in Art," *Winckelmann: Writings on Art*, ed. David Irwin (London: Phaidon, 1972), pp. 89-103.

[16] Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, "Winckelmann and His Age," *The Essential Goethe*, ed. Matthew Bell (Princeton University Press, 2016), pp. 881–902. In a visit to the Louvre in 1849, Melville claimed the Louvre was superior to the British Museum because of its "antique statues" and a few years later, in 1857, delivered a lecture titled "Statues in Rome" to heap praise upon classical statuary. See Eleanor Melville Metcalf, ed., "Friday, November 30," *Journal of a Visit to London and the Continent, 1849–1850* (London: Cohen & West, 1949), p. 48; and, Merton M. Sealts, ed., "Statues in Rome," *Melville as Lecturer* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1957), pp. 127–154.

> overwhelmed with the massive chest of the man, that seemed as a Roman triumphal arch. When Angelo paints even God the Father in human form, mark what robustness is there. And whatever they may reveal of the divine love in the Son, the soft, curled, hermaphroditical Italian pictures, in which his idea has been most successfully embodied; these pictures, so destitute as they are of all brawniness, hint nothing of any power, but the mere negative, feminine one of submission and endurance, which on all hands it is conceded, form the peculiar practical virtues of his teachings.[17]

If we take the images one-by-one, we will quickly discover an underlying logic. First, the "carved Hercules" is a reference to the famous *Farnese Hercules*.[18] Unearthed in 1540, the ten-and-a-half-foot, Hellenistic-era sculpture was quickly added to the collection of Cardinal Farnese and erected in the Palazzo Farnese courtyard. Goethe, in his *Italian Journey*, calls it "one of the most perfect works of ancient times."[19] Melville proceeds to envision Eckermann unveiling Goethe's body—marveling at his master's chest which he compares to a "Roman triumphal arch." The architectural shape of Goethe's chest after the allusion to the statue of Hercules suggests an associative bond between the German writer and the artifacts of Italy. Although Eckermann refrained from explicitly comparing Goethe's chest to a *Roman* triumphal arch in the original source, just one that is "powerful, broad, arched,"[20] Melville's insists on rolling with the Italian theme. The significance of this lies in Goethe's travelogue, *The Italian Journey*, published in 1810, reifying a unique bond between the German neoclassical art movement and classical antiquity that fellow Saxon compatriot, Johann Joachim Winckelmann, had helped forge. Melville began reading Goethe at least as early as 1850 while composing *Moby-Dick*—a fact corroborated in a letter written in 1850.[21] One can find marked passages in the surviving copy Meville had of Goethe's Italian letters. He frequently underlines or marks passages where Goethe juxtaposes the antique with the modern such as this one:

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[17] Ibid., p. 418.

[18] When Melville went to Italy in 1857, he wrote in his journal after a day's excursion when in Naples, "Marbles. Hercules Farnese—colossal. Gravely benevolent face. The group of the bull; glorious.—Tomb stones &c with inscriptions, identical with ours.—Had to quit Museum ere through it. Went in voiture to Cathedral of St. Januarius. Very fine. Thence a promiscuous drive through the older & less elegant part of town. Long narrow lanes. Arches, crowds.—" See Herman Melville, "Saturday September 28th," *Journal Up the Straits, October 11, 1856–May 5, 1857*, ed. Raymond Weaver (New York: Cooper Square Publishers, Inc., 1971), pp. 120–121.

[19] Goethe saw this sculpture with the original set of legs that were discovered in the Baths of Caracalla in 1787, the year Goethe was there. See Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Italian Journey*, *Goethe's Collected Works, Vol. 6.*, trans. Robert R. Heitner, Vol. 6 in *Goethe's Collected Works* (New Work: Suhrkamp Publishers, 1989), pp. 278–279.

> If we contemplate, on the spot, the noble buildings which Palladio has erected, and see how they are disfigured by the

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[20] Melville's comparison of Goethe's chest to a Roman triumphal arch, not only associating Goethe with antique art in Italy, but parallels an pattern of Melville comparing the male form to stone shapes such as the arch, column, and sarcophagus. See, for instance, in *Typee* when the narrator compares a man's tattooed chest to "an Egyptian sarcophagus." See Herman Melville, *Typee: A Peep at Polynesian Life During a Four Months' Residence in a Valley of the Marquesas, Part 1* (New York: Wiley and Putnam; London: John Murray, 1846) p. 8.

[21] In a now famous letter written to Nathaniel Hawthorne in 1850, Melville makes a derisive comment about Goethe's purported pantheism. Oscillating between satire and admiration, the comments go to show how much attention was brought to bear upon these German figures in New England at the time. See Herman Melville, "Herman Melville to Nathaniel Hawthorne, June [1?] 1851," *Northwestern Newberry Edition: Correspondence*, ed. Lynn Horth, vol. 14 (Northwestern University Press, 1993), p. 193.

> mean filthy necessities of the people, how the plans of most of them exceeded the means of those who undertook them, how little these precious monuments of one lofty mind are adapted to all else around, the thought occurs, that it is just the same with everything else; for we receive but little thanks from men, when we would elevate their internal aspirations, give them a great idea of themselves, and make them feel the grandeur of a really noble existence. But when one cajoles them, tells them tales, and helping them on from day to day, makes them worse, then one is just the man they like; and hence it is that modern times take delight in so many absurdities. I do not say this to lower my friends, I only say that they are so, and that people must not be astonished to find everything just as it is.[22]

Goethe's celebrated journey to Italy cemented the already existent status of the European "grand tour" as a marker of aristocratic pedigree and further enshrinement of ancient Rome as the high watermark of civilization. Johann Heinrich Wilhelm Tischbein's 1787 painting *Goethe in the Roman Campagna* captures the spirit of the journey of the aristocratic antiquarian into the world of ancient grandeur.[23] Melville would soon follow in Goethe's footsteps by journeying to Italy in 1857 and, upon returning, deliver his own Goethean travelogue in the form of a lecture titled "Statues in Rome"—echoing sentiments like those above that lament the modern and glorify the antique.[24] Melville's journey in the 1850s to the Mediterranean to visit the ancient sites of Rome, Constantinople, Jerusalem, and more, illustrates the lifelong fascination, spiritual and intellectual, he had with this region of the world—the area of the world that forms the mythopoetic consciousness of *Moby-Dick* itself.

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[22] See Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *The Autobiography of Goethe. Truth and Poetry: From My Own Life. The Concluding Books. Also Letters from Switzerland and Travels in Italy*, trans. Rev. A.J.W. Morrison (London: Henry G. Bohn, York Street, Covent Garden, 1849), p. 273.

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[23] This painting, now housed in the Städel museum in Frankfurt, was originally painted by Johann Heinrich Wilhelm Tischbein in 1787 when Goethe was staying with the German painter in Rome. The painting was conceived when the two traveled to the antique tombs in the Campagna together. In the painting, Goethe is seated on blocks of ruins, with a relief sculpture overgrown with ivy behind him and a castle in the distance. The only oddity of the painting is Goethe having two left feet. Despite this, it is the most famous painting of Goethe we have today. A lesser known painting of Tischbein's depicting Goethe is a watercolor showing the German polymath leaning out a window of Tischbein's flat in Rome, also painted in 1787. It is a backside view. The watercolor is currently housed in the collection of the Freies Deutsches Hochstift. See Tischbein's discussion of Goethe in his autobiography for more details about the two's relationship: Johann Heinrich Wilhelm Tischbein, *Aus meinem Leben*, ed. Carl G. W. Schiller (Braunschweig: C. A. Schwetschke & Sohn, 1861), pp. 87–96.

[24] For example: "We moderns pride ourselves upon our superiority, but the claim can be questioned. We did invent the printing press, but from the ancients have we not all the best thought which it circulates, whether it be law, physics, or philosophy? As the Roman arch enters into and supports our best architecture, does not the Roman spirit still animate and support whatever is soundest in societies and states? Or shall the scheme of Fourier supplant the code of Justinian? Only when the novels of Dickens shall silence the satires of Juvenal. The ancients of the ideal description, instead of trying to turn their impracticable chimeras, as does the modern dreamer, into social and political prodigies, deposited them in great works of art, which still live while states and constitutions have perished, bequeathing to posterity not shameful defects but triumphant successes. All the merchants in modern London have not enough in their coffers to re-produce the Apollo. If the Coliseum expresses the durability of Roman ideas, what does their Crystal Palace express? These buildings are exponents of the respective characters of ancients and moderns. But will the glass of the one bide the hail storms of eighteen centuries as well as the travertine of the other." Merton M. Sealts, ed., "Statues in Rome," *Melville as Lecturer* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1957), pp. 153–154.

Following the allusions to the *Farnese Hercules* and Eckermann's book on Goethe, Melville concludes the series of allusions in chapter eighty-six "The Tail" with one to Michelangelo's painting of God the Father, presumably flying across the Sistine Chapel ceiling (i.e., "When Angelo paints even God the Father in human form, mark what robustness is there"), and another to a whole genre of Italian painting depicting Christ's gaunt body not unlike those by Guido de Pietro and Pietro Lorenzetti (i.e., "the divine love in the Son, the soft, curled, hermaphroditical Italian pictures"). The dismissal of Christ as part of Melville's gallery of classical male beauty signals Melville's sympathy with, what scholar Henry Hatfield has called, the *aesthetic paganism* of the neoclassicsim in late eighteenth-century Germany.[25] After Winckelmann, many German writers, including Goethe, began writing on the art of classical antiquity at the expense of Christian art made in the medieval ages because Christian art, unlike classical art, has tended to minimize corporality in favor of spirituality.[26]

1.2 Free Vent to My Tears

Having described the passage in chapter eighty-six of *Moby-Dick* where Goethe's chest is inserted into a constellation of images depicting classical male beauty, we will now turn to the original source of the allusion. The allusion, again, hails from

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[25] Henry Hatfield, *Aesthetic Paganism in German Literature: from Winckelmann to the Death of Goethe* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964).

[26] See E.M. Butler, *The Tyranny of Greece over Germany: A study of the influence exercised by Greek art and poetry over the great German writers of the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries* (Cambridge University Press, 1935).

Eckermann's *Conversations with Goethe* which was initially published in 1836 in Germany—a second volume being published the following year. For context, the book made quite a splash due to a flurry of interest that followed the patrician's death in 1832—a significant detail given that Melville's allusion is to the corpse itself.[27] The celebrated *Conversations*, what Nietzsche came to praise as "the best German book there is," made its way over to the United States quickly due to the vogue that German literature experienced in the first half of the nineteenth-century.[28] In 1839, three years after the German edition, an English translation done by Margaret Fuller was published by Hilliard, Gray, and Company in Boston.

Now let us read the final passage in Eckermann's book in full and imagine Melville's response to it. It is important to pay attention to the series of affects that run through the passage—including the temperature of the room, the descriptions of the beautiful corpse, and the lachrymose ending. We would do well to imagine the scene of Melville's reading and the impression this passage would have made on his mind; a passage that, in its affects, can be sees as akin to the viewing of a renaissance painting or a classical sculpture:

> His faithful servant, Frederic, opened for me the chamber in which he was laid out. Stretched upon his back, he reposed as in in sleep; profound peace and security reigned

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[27] The description of his burial dress is quote moving: "So he lay in state on the ground floor of his house, dressed in a garment of white satin in the old Florentine style, his head crowned with laurel. A black velvet cloth, set with silver, covered the lower part of his body up to his breast." See Albert Bielschowsky, *The Life of Goethe*, vol. 3, trans. William A. Cooper (New York and London: G.P. Putnam's, 1908), p. 365.

[28] Germany, it should be remembered, was blamed for corrupting so much of New England thought. People referred to Transcendentalism derogatorily as Germanism.

> in the features of his noble, dignified countenance. The mighty brow seemed yet the dwelling-place of thought. I wished for a lock of his hair; but reverence prevented me from cutting it off. The body lay naked, only wrapped in a white sheet; large pieces of ice had been paced around, to keep it fresh as long as possible. Frederic drew aside the sheet, and I was astonished at the divine magnificence of the form. The breast was so powerful, broad, and arched; the limbs full, and softly muscular; the feet elegant, and of the most perfect shape; nowhere, on the whole body, a trace either of fat or of leanness and decay. A perfect man lay in great beauty before me; and the rapture which the sight caused, made me forget, for a moment, that the immortal spirit had left such an abode. I laid my hand on his heart—there was a deep silence—and I turned away to give free vent to my tears.[29]

Many details come into relief. Let us highlight the most important ones. Goethe's corpse straddles the boundary between art and life; in a deathly coldness and stillness, Goethe's body is an inanimate force that nonetheless possesses the grandeur of classical statuary, marble-like, in death. Indeed, the "large pieces of ice" and "white sheet" around the corpse instantly evoke the coldness of renaissance frescos and ancient marbles. The "mighty brow" of Eckermann's master is a physiognomic characteristic that was oft ascribed to busts of classical luminaries such as Homer—signifying bard-like wisdom and sagacity. It is, moreover, the physiognomic trait that Melville invokes to deify the leviathan in chapter seventy-nine of *Moby-Dick*, writing, "But in the great Sperm Whale, this high and mighty god-like dignity inherent in the brow is so immensely amplified, that gazing on it, in that full front view, you feel the Deity and the dread powers more forcibly than in beholding any other object in living nature."[30] Following Eckermann's gaze from the brow of the head down to the torso, Goethe's breast is gazed upon next and judged as "powerful, broad, and arched." Recall that Melville's thesis on classical male beauty, in chapter eighty-six, was that grace and strength ideally unite to constitute a merging of opposites. Ergo, it is significant that Goethe embodies largeness of imposition in the torso region with a chest "powerful, broad, and arched" that is then balanced by "feet elegant" and limbs that are "softly muscular." The juxtaposition of features (i.e., broad then elegant, muscular yet soft) recalls Samuel Taylor Coleridge's romantic theory of the esemplastic power of the imagination as the synthesis of opposites.[31]

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[29] Johann Peter Eckermann, *Conversations with Goethe in the Last Years of His Life*, trans. S.M. Fuller (Boston: Hilliard, Gray, and Co., 1839), p. 414.

Goethe, in his marble-like state of death has a deathly hue of white, accented by the white sheet laying over him, that is reminiscent of the White Whale himself. In Melville's philosophical chapter "The Whiteness of the Whale," he compares the Whale's mystical whiteness to "the very veil of the Christian's Deity; and yet should be as it is, the intensifying agent in things the most appalling to mankind."[32] The romantic fascination with veiling, especially in necrophiliac contexts, emerges in chapter thirty-six "The Quarter Deck" when it is said of Captain Ahab that, "if ever Captain Ahab should be tranquilly laid out—which might hardly come to pass, so he muttered—then, whoever should do that last office for the dead, would find a birth-mark on him from crown to sole."[33] In Melville's case of reading Eckermann, he was impressed by the sublime vision of a young man beholding the master's nobility in death. There is a deep ambivalence to the father figure's flesh and blood in death, Oedipal to some degree, as one marvels at their deeds told in tales when they were alive. It provides the ephebic young man marginal power over the old man in his vulnerable state of death while simultaneously rendering him impotent to challenge his reign.

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[30] Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick; or, the Whale* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1851), p. 386.

[31] Coleridge, representative for the romantic movement, provided famous definitions of the imagination in his *Biographia Literaria*. While many definitions are given, the one most pertinent to the present discussion is the one with the following heading, "On the imagination, or esemplastic power": "The imagination then, I consider either as primary, or secondary. The primary IMAGINATION I hold to be the living Power and prime Agent of all human Perception, and as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM. The secondary Imagination I consider as an echo of the former, co-existing with the conscious will, yet still as identical with the primary in the *kind* of its agency and differing only in *degree*, and in the *mode* of its operation. It dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to recreate; or where this process is rendered impossible, yet still at all events it struggles to idealize and unify. It is essentially *vital*, even as all objects (as objects) are essentially fixed and dead." Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literary*, vol. 1 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1907), p. 202.

Eckermann, in this passage resists defiling the corpse by refusing to cut his hair, "I wished for a lock of his hair; but reverence prevented me from cutting it off"; yet he breaks the taboo of touching the sacred object by laying his hand on Goethe's heart, triggering a lachrymose response of uncontrolled weeping. The swarm of emotions of a man trying to process another man's beauty is the kernel of the episode. It is the bud and blossom of Melville's constellation of images, including the *Farnese Hercules*, Michelangelo's painting of God the Father, and Eckermann's ekphrastic description. That Melville includes Eckermann's textual description among visual art pieces such as sculpture and painting illustrates the visual power of imaginative writing that the romantics ascribed so much significance to. Writing here is a multi-sensory medium of affects including temperature (i.e., heat and cold), tactility, and physiology in a *tristesse* of the imagination

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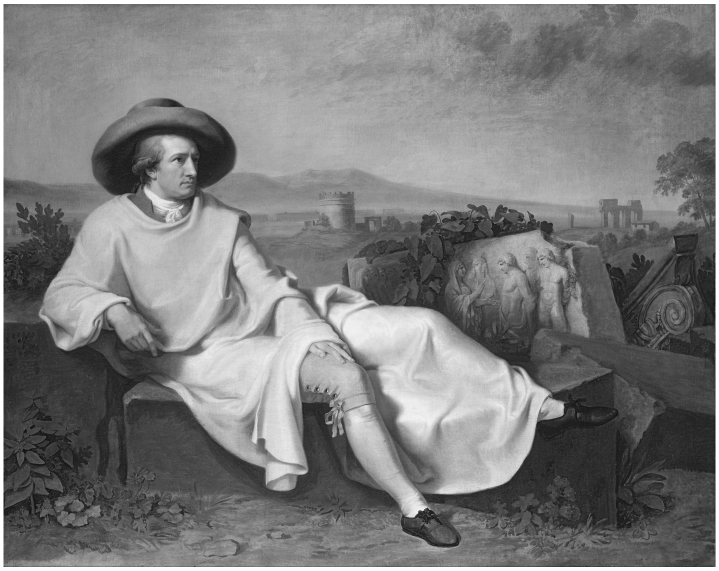
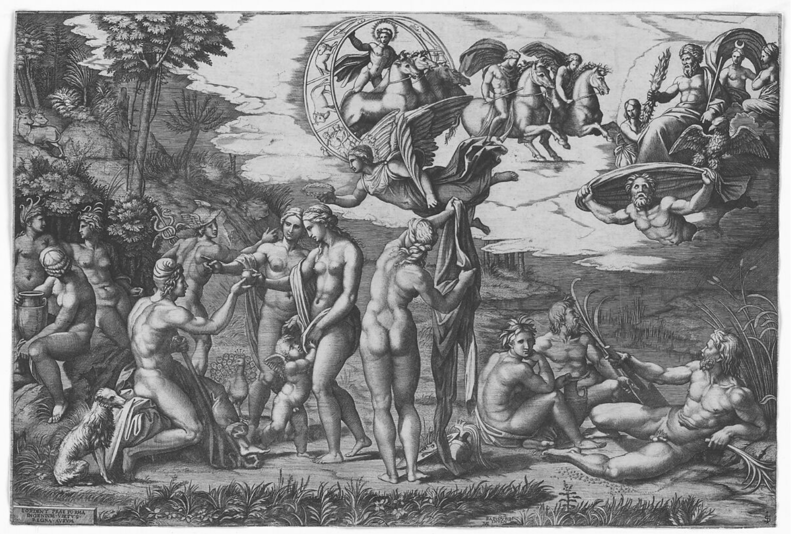
[32] Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick; or, the Whale* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1851), p. 216.

[33] Ibid., pp. 135–136.

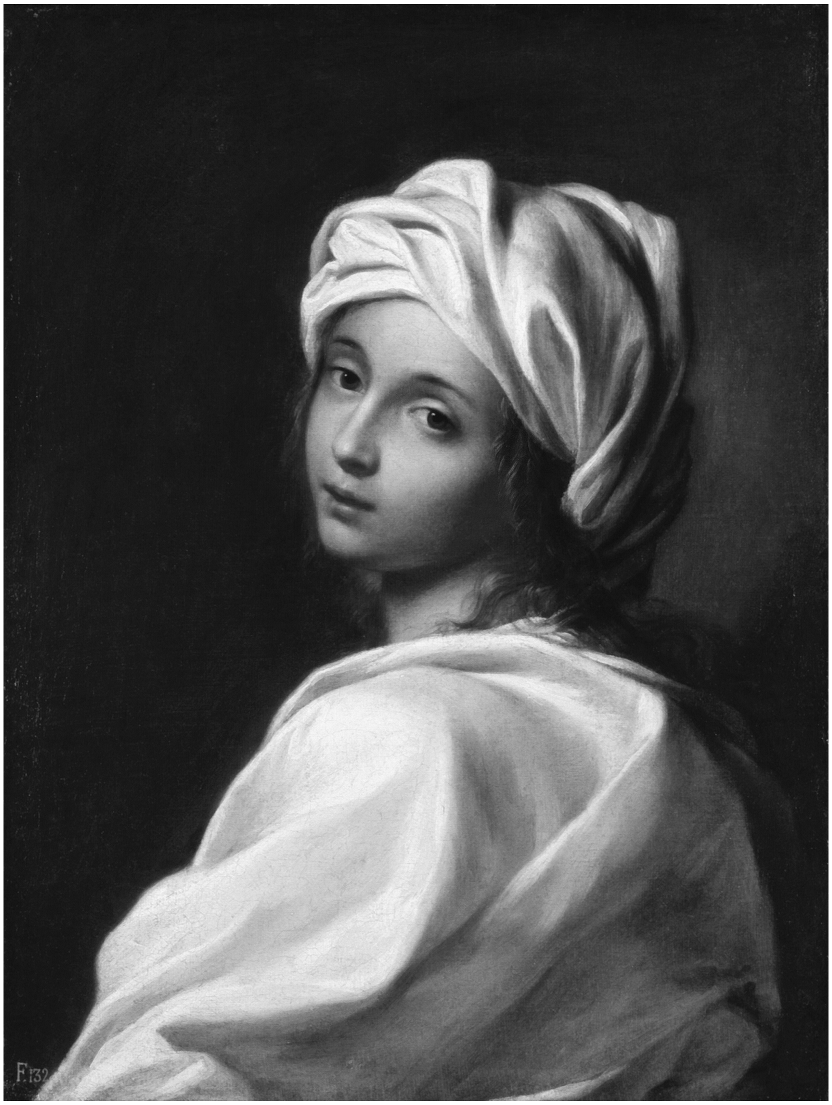
—affects essential to Eckermann's engagement with Goethe's corpse as a dynamic work of art in this ekphrastic vignette.



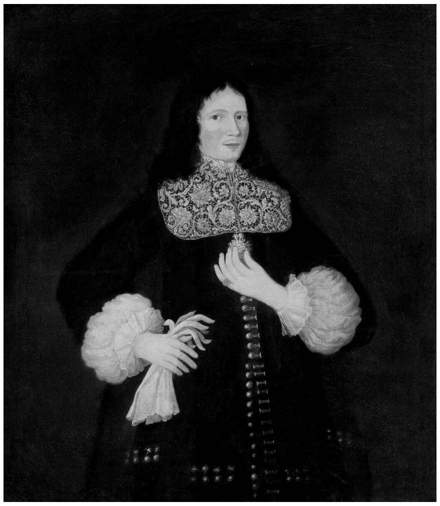
Johann Henrich Wilhelm Tischbein, *Goethe in the Roman Campagna,* c. 1787, oil on canvas, Städel Museum, Frankfurt.



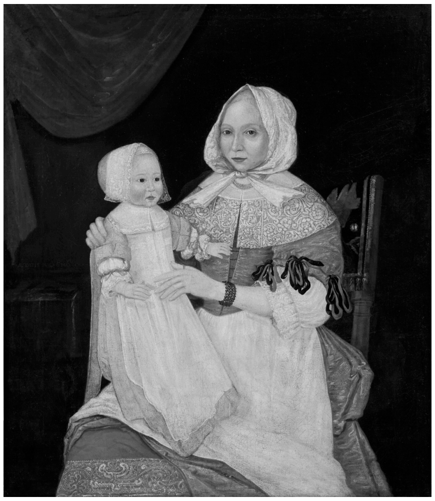
Marcantonio Raimondi, after Raphael, *The Judgment of Paris*, c. 1510, engraving on paper, Uffizi Gallery, Florence.



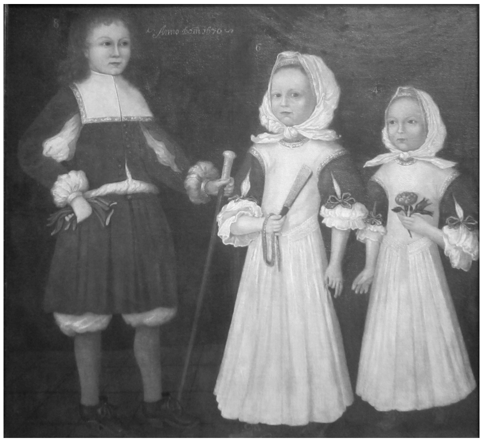
Portrait of Beatrice Cenci, c. 1600, oil on canvas, National Gallery of Ancient Art, Rome.



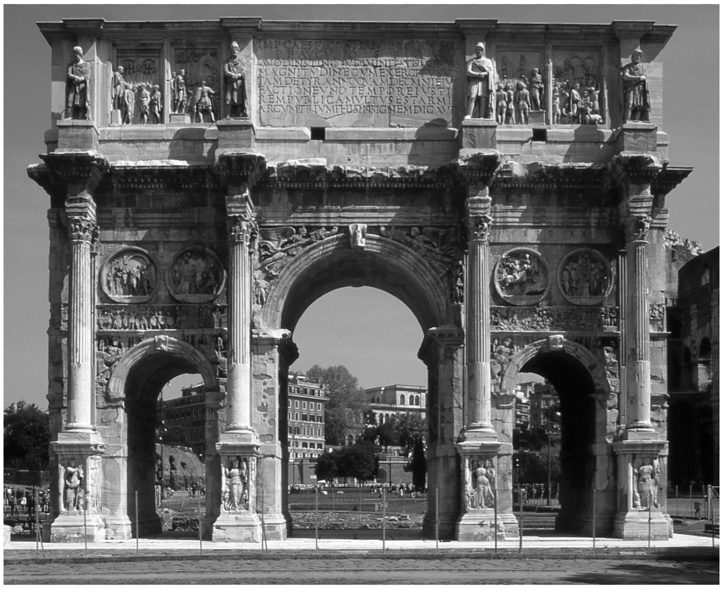
John Freake, c. 1671, oil on canvas, Worcester Art Museum.



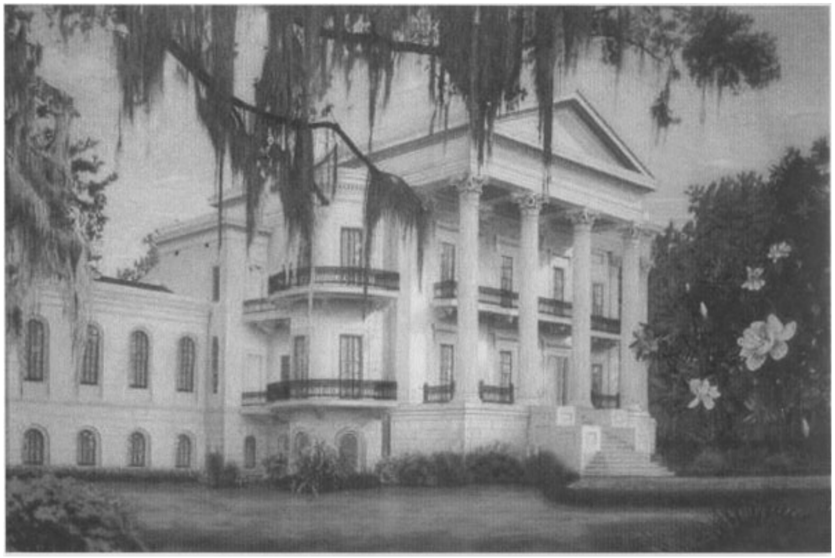
Elizabeth Claarke Freake, c. 1671, oil on canvas, Worcester Art Museum.



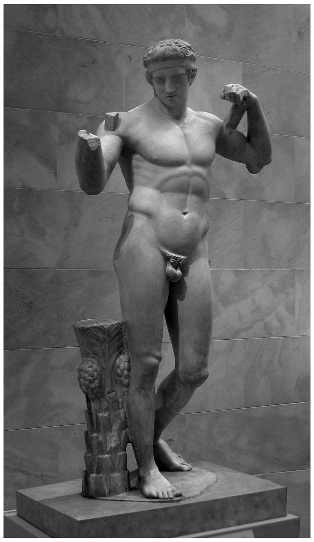
The Mason Children, c. 1670, oil on canvas, The Fine Arts Museum of San Francisco.



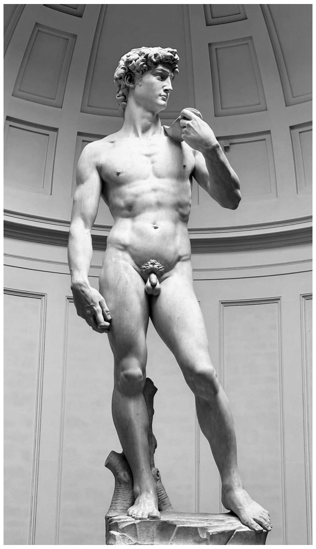
The Arch of Constantine, completed in 315 AD, commemorates Constantine's victory at the Battle of the Milvian Bridge. Rome, Italy.



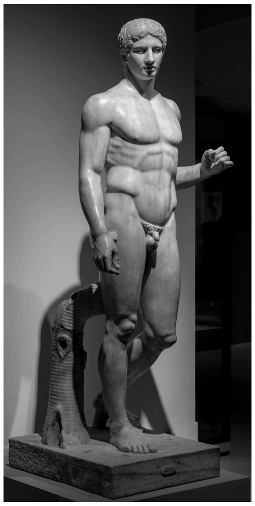
Belle Grove Plantation, completed in 1857, but destroyed by fire in 1952. Iberville Parish, Louisiana.



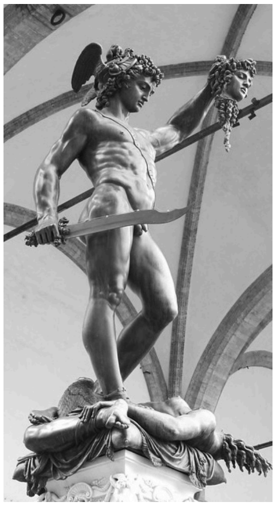
Diadoumenos, after Polykleitos, marble, 1st century AD, The MET, New York.



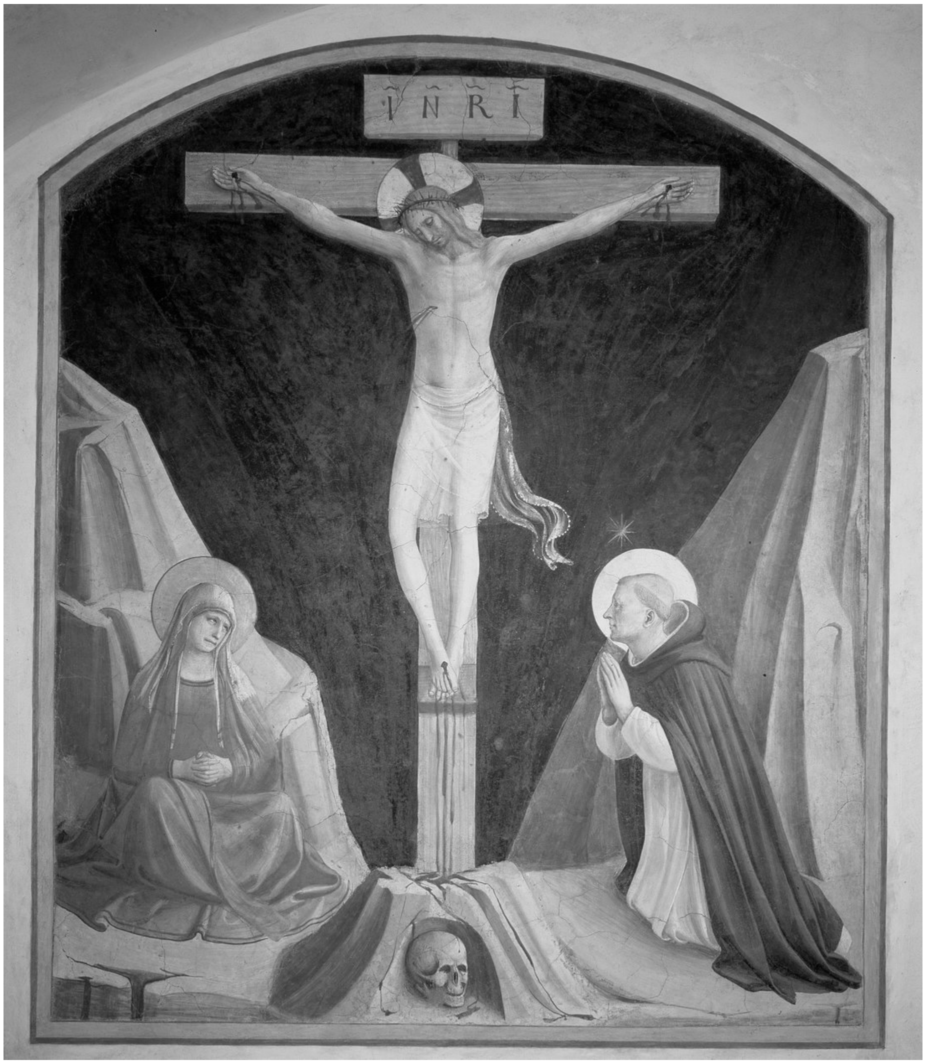
Michelangelo, *David*, c. 1504, marble, Academic Gallery, Florence.



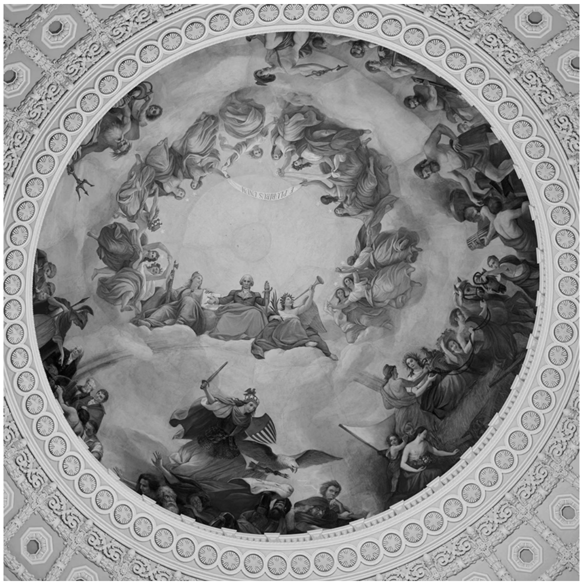
Doryphoros, after Polykleitos, marble c. 1st century BC or AD, Naples National Archaeological Museum.



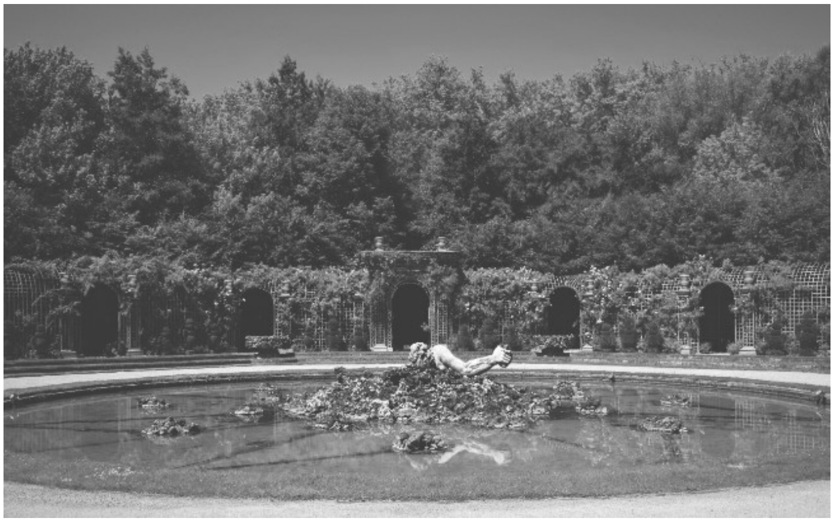
Benvenuto Cellini, *Perseus with the Head of Medusa*, c. 1554, bronze, Piazza della Signoria, Florence.



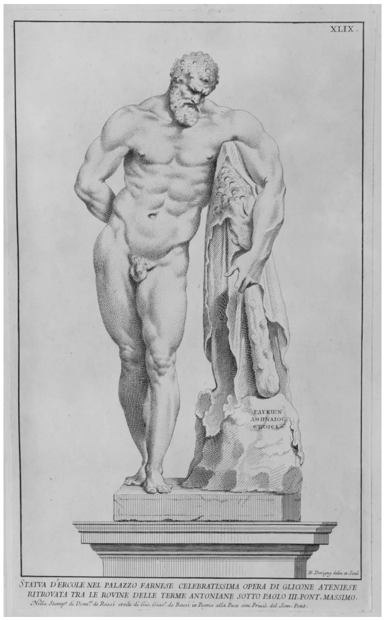
Fra Angelico, *Crucifixion with Mary, Saint Peter the Martyr, Golgotha, and the skull of Adam*, c. 1440s, fresco, Convent of San Marco, Florence.



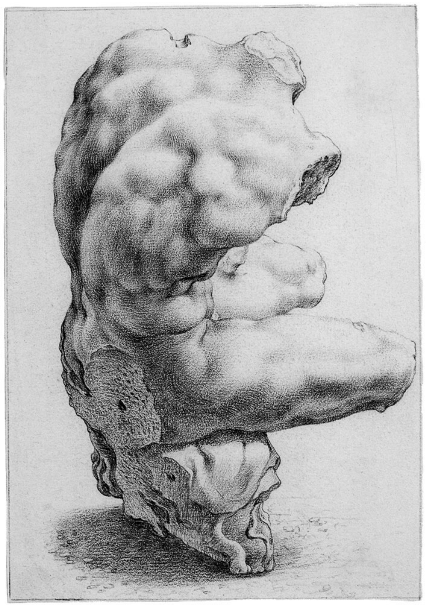
Constantino Brumidi, *Apotheosis of Washington*, 1865, fresco, U.S. Capitol Rotunda, Washington, D.C.



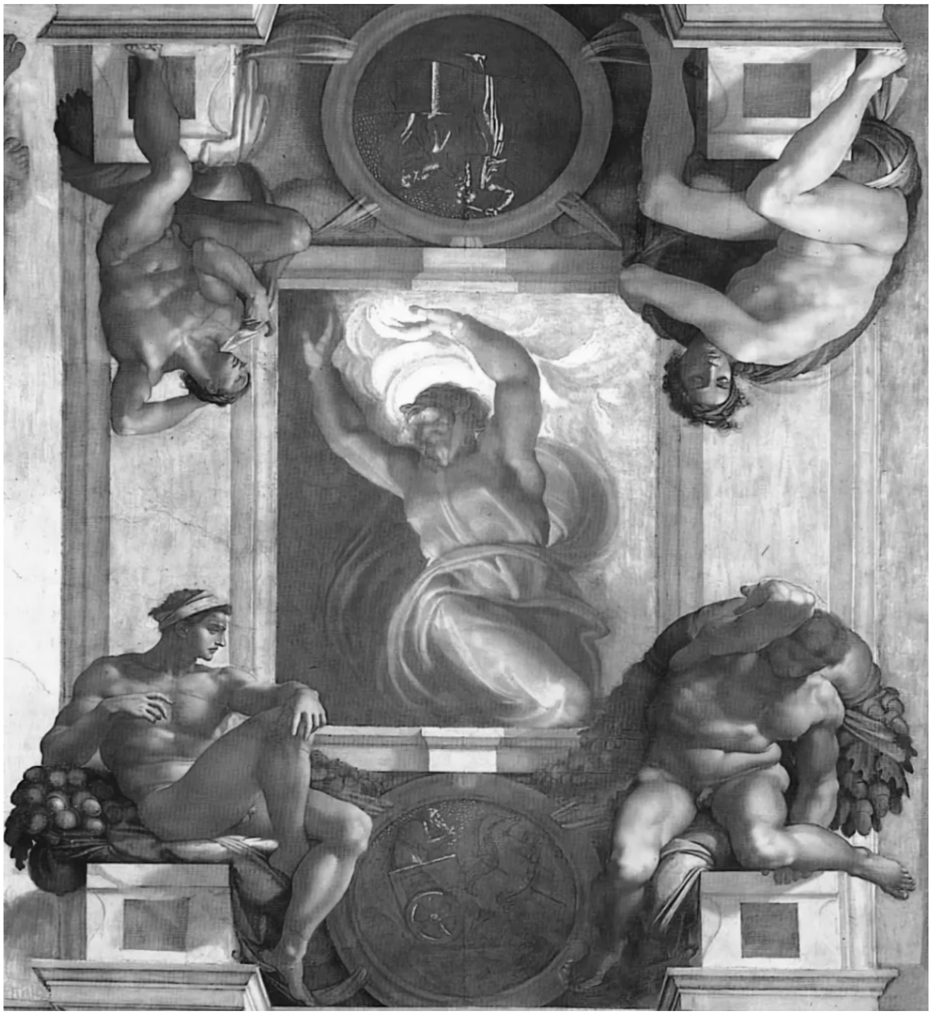
Gaspard Marsy, *Fountain of Enceladus*, c. 1677, gilded lead, Gardens of Versailles.


XLIX
N. Dorigny delin. et Sculp.
STATVA D'ERCOLE NEL PALAZZO FARNESE CELEBRATISSIMA OPERA DI GLICONE ATENIESE
RITROVATA TRA LE ROVINE DELLE TERME ANTONIANE SOTTO PAOLO III. PONT. MASSIMO.
Nella Stampa di Dom.co de Rossi erede di Gio. Giac.o de Rossi in Roma alla Pace con Priuil. del Som. Pont.

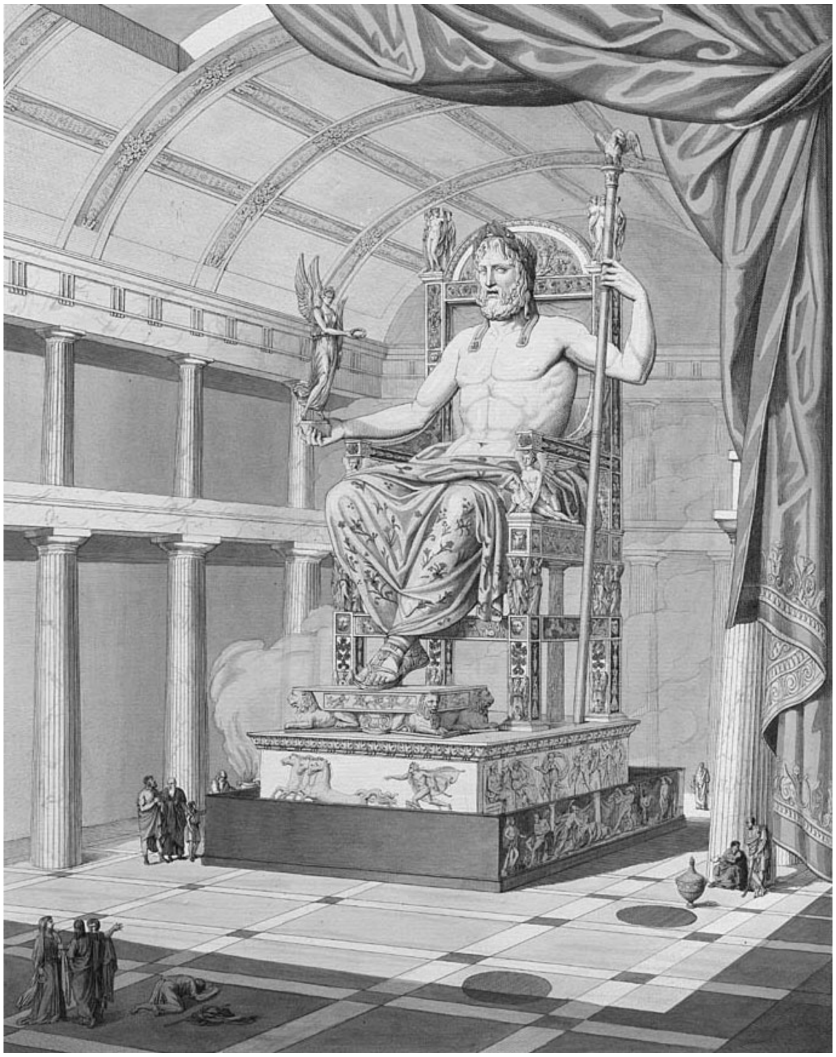
Sir Noclas Dorigny, “Farnese Hercules (front),” 1704, engraving, Royal Academy of Art, London.



Hendrick Goltzius, “Belvedere Torso, viewed diagonally from behind,” 1591, black chalk, Teylers Museum, Haarlem.



Michelangelo, *Separation of Light from Darkness*, c. 1512, fresco, Vatican City, Rome.



Antoint-Chrysostome Quatremère de Quincy, *Le Jupiter Olypien vu dans son trône*, 1814, etching and watercolour, Royal Academy of Arts, London.

2

THE FRANCO-ITALIAN BAROQUE IN *PIERRE*

2.1 An Unequivocal Aspect of Foreignness, of Europeanism

France and Italy are the answer to Herman Melville's kraken of a novel *Pierre; or the Ambiguities* published in 1852 to dubious reviews. While the book's prose has been recognized as some of Melville's finest, its chromaticism of moods, what one reviewer once called a "farrago," suggests a departure from standard fare nineteenth-century literature. We must agree with critic George Washington Peck that, "Mr. Melville's style of writing in this book is probably the most extraordinary thing that an American press ever beheld."[34] The tapestry of prose includes creative neologisms, waterfalls of rushing syntax, archaic modes of address, and an array of "-ness" words. Thematically, Melville brews gothic and chivalric tropes as if Anne Radcliffe and Edmund Spenser had a love-child. The biggest criticism of the novel, one analyzed by veteran critic Hershel Parker, is a non sequitur in the plot.[35] While these things are of interest, the goal of this chapter is to analyze the book's incorporation of the visual arts of France and Italy.

To understand the argument, we must rewind to Book IV "Retrospective." Here, Pierre, the protagonist, recalls his Aunt Dorothea's story about a gift she had given him of a portrait depicting his father as a young bachelor. According to her, Pierre's uncle Ralph "picked" his father's portrait while his father was under the spell of a beautiful young French woman.[36] Pierre's recollection of this memory is prompted in Book III after receiving a tear-stained letter from a young girl claiming to be his half-blood sister. Connecting this memory with another opaque memory of his father gasping "My daughter! My daughter!" on his deathbed, Pierre is led to the troubling conclusion that he has a bastard sister.[37] The significance of all this is that the woman who mothered Pierre's half-sister was a French *émigré* of royal blood who fled during the revolution. The scandalous intrusion of the French into the Glendinning bloodline, a Scottish surname, forms the first steppingstone over into the world of the fine arts in this strange tale that has one foot in America and one foot in Europe.

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[34] See Brian Higgins and Hershel Parker, eds., *Herman Melville: The Contemporary Reviews* (Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 439, 447.

[35] Herschel Parker has compiled the biographical details for why Melville may have sabotaged the plot of *Pierre*. See Hershel Parker, "Why *Pierre* Went Wrong," *Studies in the Novel*, vol. 8, no. 1, 1976, pp. 7–23.

But, how can Pierre believe that Isabel is, in fact, his half-blood sister? With no smoking gun to prove the veracity of her claims, the shred of evidence that pushes Pierre over the edge is Isabel herself—or, what the novel stresses agains and again as the enthralling beauty of her French face. In Book III, Pierre and

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[36] The two paintings of Herman Melville's father, the chair portrait and drawing room portrait, refer to two separate paintings in Melville's family: the chair portrait is based on a small watercolor (8 7/8 x 6 3/4 inches) of Melville's father done in 1810 by John Rubens Smith, a London born painter who settled in New York. The drawing-room portrait is a half-length, oil portrait by American artist Ezra Ames now held by the Huntington Library in San Marino, California. Melville's maternal grandfather, Peter Gansevoort, is allegorized as Pierre's grandfather as the patriarch of Saddle Meadows who fought Native Americans and the British. His bellicose characterization refers to an actual defense of Fort Stanwix in 1777. A famous portrait of General Gansevoort painted by the American painter Gilbert Stuart in 1794 now hangs in the Munson-Williams-Proctor Institute of Art in Uttica, New York. Pierre refers to this painting as "a full-length of his gold-laced grandfather." For Stuart's portrait of General Peter Gansevoort, as well as Peter Gansevoort's father, Melville's grandfather, Leonard Gansevoort, see Lawrence Park, *Gilbert Stuart: an Illustrated Descriptive List of His Work*, vol. 3 (New York: W.E. Rudge, 1926), pp. 183–184.

[37] Herman Melville, *Pierre; or, the Ambiguities* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1852), p. 94.

Isabel first cross paths while Pierre is dutifully escorting his mother to a local knitting group:

> Steadfastly, with his one first and last fraternal inquisition of the person of the mystic girl, Pierre now for an instant eyes her; and in that one instant sees in the imploring *face* [my emphasis], not only the nameless touchingness of that of the sewing-girl, but also the subtler expression of the portrait of his then youthful father, strangely translated, and intermarryingly blended with some before unknown, foreign feminineness. In one breath, Memory and Prophecy, and Intuition tell him—'Pierre, have no reserves; no minutest possible doubt;—this being is thy sister; thou gazest on thy father's flesh.[38]

The visual arts is used as a prism for discussing beauty as a product of genealogy. It leads to the end of the novel when a portrait by an Italian hand resembling Pierre and Isabel's father suggests "an unequivocal aspect of foreignness, of Europeanism," echoing the "foreign feminineness" spoken of here.[39] Where visual artworks are used as mediums to negotiate beauty and blood ties in a trans-Atlantic space, it is no accident that they are tied to the nations of France and Italy—lands that Americans such as Melville held in such high esteem for their cultivation of the fine arts.[40]

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[38] Ibid., p. 151.

[39] Ibid., pp. 479–480.

[40] See Scottish writer Tobias Smollett's anti-Catholic tirade in *Travels Through France and Italy* published in 1766, and Laurence Sterne's parody *A Sentimental Journey Through France and Italy* published soon after in 1768. These books are both important for Melville, who, albeit satirically or not, engages the traditions of the sentimental novel and the British travel writer in continental Europe. The closest precursor for an American doing this was Washington Irving. See also Edward Wright's *Some observations made in travelling through France, Italy, &c. in the years 1720, 1721, and 1722.*

2.2 The Broad-Flung Pride of Bourbon

The appeal of France for the eye of the American artist was that one could look upon the human form without shame, a red blush, or any sense of inner guilt. The attitude of Americans toward nude art had been hamstrung by puritanical associations of nude statuary with Roman Catholicism and Greco-Roman religion. Even when a rare classical nude was limned, it was seldom in masculine form. The *Greek Slave* by Hiram Powers, the most famous piece of nude statuary made by an American, is a female nude that is choked by a stifling neoclassicism.[41] Melville's sensibility for classical values helped him circumvent these oppositions to classical art. When visiting continental Europe for the first time in 1849, he visited the Louvre in Paris, and it remains a pivotal point in his education. The occasion was marked by the following comment in his diary: "Then in a bus (roundabout way) to the Louvre, spent three hours in the Museum. Heaps of treasures of all sorts. *Admirable collection of antique statuary* [my emphasis]. Beats the British Museum."[42] In *Pierre*, this budding infatuation with classical art is evident. Pierre's incineration of his father's portrait into the fireplace when exiting Saddle Meadows is symbolic of his turn away from Anglo-Saxon toward Franco-Italian art.[43]

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[41] See Tanya Pohrt, "*The Greek Slave* on Tour in America," *Nineteenth-Century Art Worldwide*, vol. 15, no. 2 (Summer 2016).

[42] Eleanor Melville Metcalf, ed., "Friday, November 30," *Journal of a Visit to London and the Continent, 1849–1850* (London: Cohen & West, 1949), p. 48. Melville's interest in statues here in Paris anticipates his own effort to lecture on fine art in the United States with his "Statues in Rome" lecture in 1857. Merton M. Sealts, ed., "Statues in Rome," *Melville as Lecturer* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1957), pp. 127–154.

Once Melville reached Paris in 1849, he took a horse and carriage to visit the chateau of Versailles. First begun as a hunting lodge in the early seventeenth century, the property developed into a royal palace in the following decades. Its proximity to Paris caught the court's attention, and it was eventually designated as the capitol in 1682. In 1849, Melville strolled through the gardens commissioned by King Louis XIV in 1661. Spanning some two-thousand acres, the gardens are the largest open air sculpture gallery in the world.[44] These details are important for reading Pierre's stunning vision in Book XXV of the Enceladus statue where the pastoral setting colors the scene. The vision climaxes with a defiant cry: "'Enceladus! it is Enceladus!'", and then Pierre sees "on the Titan's armless trunk, his own duplicate face and features magnifiedly gleamed upon him."[45] The giant's armless torso, reminiscent of the *Belvedere Torso* that Michelangelo held in such high esteem, is highlighted.[46] Significantly, a baroque-styled dynamism is stressed in the writhing movement, emotional intensity, and gush of water in the fountain technology:

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[43] The Roman senate, after Julius Caesar, had the responsibility of judging whether to condemn or consecrate an emperor after his death. Condemnation would result in the effacement of their image and likeness from coins, public buildings, and other areas of civic life while consecration would perpetuate and preserve it. In a famous quote by the Pliny the Younger, he writes of the *damnatio memoriae* after Domitian's condemnation had been issued, "It was our delight to dash those proud faces to the ground, to smite them with the sword and savage them with the axe, as if blood and pain would follow from every blow. Our transports of joy—so long deferred were unrestrained; all sought a form of vengeance in beholding those bodies mutilated, limbs hacked in pieces, and finally that baleful, fearsome visage cast into fire to be melted down, so that from such menacing terror something for man's use and enjoyment should rise out of the flames." See Pliny the Younger, "Panegyric 52.4–5," *Letters and Panegyrics*, Loeb Classical Library, 2 vols., trans. Betty Radice (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1975), pp. 440–441.

[44] American artist John Vanderlyn experimented with panoramic exhibits. He painted a panoramic view of Versailles that measured twelve feet tall and one-hundred sixty-five feet around to create an immersive experience. See Kevin J. Avery & Peter L. Fodera, *John Vanderlyn's panoramic view of the palace and gardens of Versailles* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1988).

> To Pierre this wondrous shape had always been a thing of interest, though hitherto all its latent significance had never fully and intelligibly smitten him. In his earlier boyhood a strolling company of young collegian pedestrians had chanced to light upon the rock; and, struck with its remarkableness, had brought a score of picks and spades, and dug round it to unearth it, and find whether indeed it were a demoniac freak of nature, or some stern thing of antediluvian art. Accompanying this eager party, Pierre first beheld that deathless son of Terra. At that time, in its untouched natural state, the statue presented nothing but the turbaned head of igneous rock rising from out the soil, with its unabasable face turned upward toward the mountain, and the bull-like neck clearly defined. With distorted features, scarred and broken, and a black brow mocked by the upborn moss, Enceladus there subterraneously stood, fast frozen into the earth at the junction of the neck. Spades and picks soon heaved part of his Ossa from him, till at last a circular well was opened round him to the depth of some thirteen feet. At that point the wearied young collegians gave over their enterprise in despair. With all their toil, they had not yet come to the girdle of Enceladus. But they had

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[45] Herman Melville, *Pierre; or, the Ambiguities* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1852), p. 472.

[46] See Thomas Davidson, "Winckelmann's Description of the Torso: Of the Hercules of Belvedere in Rome," *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy*, vol. 2, no. 3, 1868, pp. 187–89.

bared good part of his mighty chest, and exposed his mutilated shoulders, and the stumps of his once audacious arms. Thus far uncovering his shame, in that cruel plight they had abandoned him, leaving stark naked his in vain indignant chest to the defilements of the birds, which for untold ages had cast their foulness on his vanquished crest.

Not unworthy to be compared with that leaden Titan, wherewith the art of Marsy and the broad-flung pride of Bourbon enriched the enchanted gardens of Versailles;—and from whose still twisted mouth for sixty feet the waters yet upgush, in elemental rivalry with those Etna flames, of old asserted to be the malicious breath of the borne-down giant;—not unworthy to be compared with that leaden demi-god—piled with costly rocks, and with one bent wrenching knee protruding from the broken bronze;—not unworthy to be compared with that bold trophy of high art, this American Enceladus, wrought by the vigorous hand of Nature's self, it did go further than compare;—it did far surpass that fine figure molded by the inferior skill of man. Marsy gave arms to the eternally defenseless; but Nature, more truthful, performed an amputation, and left the impotent Titan without one serviceable ball-and-socket above the thigh.

Such was the wild scenery—the Mount of Titans, and the repulsed group of heaven-assaulters, with Enceladus in their midst shamefully recumbent at its base;—such was the wild scenery, which now to Pierre, in his strange vision, displaced the four blank walls, the desk, and camp-bed, and domineered upon his trance. But no longer petrified in all their ignominious attitudes, the herded Titans now sprung to their feet; flung themselves up the slope; and anew battered at the precipice's unresounding wall. Foremost among them all, he saw a moss-turbaned,

> armless giant, who despairing of any other mode of wreaking his immitigable hate, turned his vast trunk into a battering-ram, and hurled his own arched-out ribs again and yet again against the invulnerable steep.
>
> "Enceladus! it is Enceladus!"—Pierre cried out in his sleep. That moment the phantom faced him; and Pierre saw Enceladus no more; but on the Titan's armless trunk, his own duplicate face and features magnifiedly gleamed upon him with prophetic discomfiture and woe. With trembling frame he started from his chair, and woke from that ideal horror to all his actual grief.[47]

When the narrator challenges the Marsy sculpture with a better version, a so-called American version (i.e., "this American Enceladus"), we see the chest-thumping that is characteristic of Melville's nationalistic phase. That Enceladus is "the son of incestuous Cœlus and Terra" and Pierre feels the "doubly incestuous Enceladus within him" harkens back to the incestuous match between him and his sister Isabel, which harkens back to his father's tryst with the beautiful young French woman.[48]

2.3 A Real Italian Gem of Art

While ekphrasis has been lurking in the background of this study, it is in *Pierre* that we are able to make a more convincing statement about it. Gotthold Ephraim Lessing attempted to differentiate the arts of poetry and painting in his 1766 treatise *Laocoon: An Essay on the Limits of Painting and Poetry*—echoing the *paragone* in renaissance Italy.[49] The gist of Lessing's argument was that painting was defined by frozen space while literature was a temporal progression. The temporal suspension of visual art is the point to underscore in our attempt to penetrate these so-called ambiguities of *Pierre*. Consider the moment, referenced earlier, where Pierre catches a glimpse at Isabel's face:

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[47] Herman Melville, *Pierre; or, the Ambiguities* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1852), p. 470.

[48] Ibid., p. 473.

> The face haunted him as some imploring, and beauteous, impassioned, ideal Madonna's haunts the morbidly longing and enthusiastic, but ever-baffled artist. And ever, as the mystic face thus rose before his fancy's sight, another sense was touched in him; the long-drawn, unearthly, girlish shriek pealed through and through his soul; for now he knew the shriek came from the face—such Delphic shriek could only come from such a source. And wherefore that shriek? thought Pierre. Bodes it ill to the face, or me, or both? How am I changed, that my appearance on any scene should have power to work such woe? But it was mostly the face—the face, that wrought upon him. The shriek seemed as incidentally embodied there.[50]

In some real sense, this description anticipates the portrait of Beatrice Cenci at the book's conclusion when the group of patrons (i.e., Isabel, Lucy, and Pierre) are confronted with "a real Italian gem of art." Just as the portrait *Beatrice Cenci* features a young maiden looking behind her shoulder in a diagonal pose to create the moment of highest intensity, all the while suggesting movement and immediacy, as if she has just been called by a voice, Pierre can only describe his experience at the Miss Pennies as akin to a moment frozen in time. The intensity of it smothers the "ever baffled artist," as Melville calls him.

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[49] Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, *Laocoon: An Essay upon the Limits of Painting and Poetry*, trans. Ellen Frothingham (New York: the Noonday Press, 1957). Paragone is an Italian word that means "comparison." Renaissance artists used it when comparing the virtues of painting and sculpture. See, for instance, the following insights Leonardo da Vinci makes in the following notebook entry of his titled "Paragone Della Pittura Colla Scultura." Leonardo da Vinci, "Paragone Della Pittura Colla Scultura," *Frammenti letterari e filosofici*, *Favole - Allegorie - Pensieri - Paesi - Figure – Profezie*, A cura di Edmondo Solmi (Firenze, 1904).

[50] Herman Melville, *Pierre; or, the Ambiguities* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1852), p. 63.

The portrait of Beatrice Cenci by Guido Reni in the art gallery is doubled by a portrait by an anonymous hand. This mirrored portrait is referred to as "a real Italian gem of art" that catches Isabel by surprise as if she had looked into her own glass, saying, "'My God! see! See! … only my mirror has ever shown me that look before! See! see!'"[51] This painting resurrects the painting Pierre had incinerated in the fireplace while departing Saddle Meadows, but whereas the previous portrait is representative of British portraiture, the new version is by an Italian hand with that "unequivocal aspect of foreignness, of Europeanism," moving from the British isles to the continent of Europe:

> In the anteroom, a catalogue was put into his [Pierre's] hand. He paused to give one hurried, comprehensive glance at it. Among long columns of such names as Rubens, Raphael, Angelo, Domenichino, Da Vinci, all shamelessly prefaced with the words "undoubted," or "testified," Pierre met the following brief line:—"*No. 99. A stranger's head, by an unknown hand.*"
>
> It seemed plain that the whole must be a collection of those wretched imported daubs, which with the incredible effrontery peculiar to some of the foreign picture-dealers in America, were christened by the loftiest names known to Art. But as the most mutilated torsoes of

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[51] Ibid., p. 478.

the perfections of antiquity are not unworthy the student's attention, neither are the most bungling modern incompletenesses: for both are torsoes; one of perished perfections in the past; the other, by anticipation, of yet unfulfilled perfections in the future. Still, as Pierre walked along by the thickly hung walls, and seemed to detect the infatuated vanity which must have prompted many of these utterly unknown artists in the attempted execution by feeble hand of vigorous themes; he could not repress the most melancholy foreboding concerning himself. All the walls of the world seemed thickly hung with the empty and impotent scope of pictures, grandly outlined, but miserably filled. The smaller and humbler pictures, representing little familiar things, were by far the best executed; but these, though touching him not unpleasingly, in one restricted sense, awoke no dormant majesties in his soul, and therefore, upon the whole, were contemptibly inadequate and unsatisfactory.

At last Pierre and Isabel came to that painting of which Pierre was capriciously in search—No. 99.

"My God! see! see!" cried Isabel, under strong excitement, "only my mirror has ever shown me that look before! See! see!"

By some mere hocus-pocus of chance, or subtly designing knavery, a real Italian gem of art had found its way into this most hybrid collection of impostures.

No one who has passed through the great galleries of Europe, unbewildered by their wonderful multitudinousness of surpassing excellence—a redundancy which neutralizes all discrimination or individualizing capacity in most ordinary minds—no calm, penetrative person can have victoriously run that painted gauntlet of the gods, without certain very special emotions, called forth by some one or more individual paintings, to which, however, both the catalogues and the criticisms of the greatest connoisseurs deny any all-transcending merit, at all answering to the effect thus casually produced. There is no time now to show fully how this is; suffice it, that in such instances, it is not the abstract excellence always, but often the accidental congeniality, which occasions this wonderful emotion. Still, the individual himself is apt to impute it to a different cause; hence, the headlong enthusiastic admiration of some one or two men for things not at all praised by—or at most, which are indifferent to—the rest of the world;—a matter so often considered inexplicable.

But in this Stranger's Head by the Unknown Hand, the abstract general excellence united with the all-surprising, accidental congeniality in producing an accumulated impression of power upon both Pierre and Isabel. Nor was the strangeness of this at all impaired by the plain uninterestedness of Lucy concerning that very picture. Indeed, Lucy—who, owing to the occasional jolting of the crowd, had loosened her arm from Pierre's, and so, gradually, had gone on along the pictured hall in advance—Lucy had thus passed the strange painting, without the least special pause, and had now wandered round to the precisely opposite side of the hall; where, at this present time, she was standing motionless before a very tolerable copy (the only other good thing in the collection) of that sweetest, most touching, but most awful of all feminine heads—The Cenci of Guido. The wonderfulness of which head consists chiefly, perhaps, in a striking, suggested contrast, half-identical with, and half-analogous to, that almost supernatural one—sometimes visible in the maidens of tropical nations—namely, soft and light blue eyes, with an extremely fair complexion; vailed by funereally jetty hair. But with blue eyes and fair complexion, the Cenci's hair is golden—physically, therefore, all is in strict, natural keeping; which, nevertheless, still the more intensifies the suggested fanciful anomaly of so sweetly and seraphically *blonde* a being, being double-hooded, as it were, by the black crape of the two most horrible crimes (of one of which she is the object, and of the other the agent) possible to civilized humanity—incest and parricide.

Now, this Cenci and "the Stranger" were hung at a good elevation in one of the upper tiers; and, from the opposite walls, exactly faced each other; so that in secret they seemed pantomimically talking over and across the heads of the living spectators below.

With the aspect of the Cenci every one is familiar. "The Stranger" was a dark, comely, youthful man's head, portentously looking out of a dark, shaded ground, and ambiguously smiling. There was no discoverable drapery; the dark head, with its crisp, curly, jetty hair, seemed just disentangling itself from out of curtains and clouds. But to Isabel, in the eye and on the brow, were certain shadowy traces of her own unmistakable likeness; while to Pierre, this face was in part as the resurrection of the one he had burnt at the Inn. Not that the separate features were the same; but the pervading look of it, the subtler interior keeping of the entirety, was almost identical; still, for all this, there was an unequivocal aspect of foreignness, of Europeanism, about both the face itself and the general painting.

"Is it? Is it? Can it be?" whispered Isabel, intensely.[52]

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[52] Herman Melville, *Pierre; or, the Ambiguities* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1852), pp. 477–480.

In this portrait of Pierre and Isabel's father, the "real Italian gem of art," an element of Italianness is ascribed to him. Combined with the Frenchness ascribed to Isabel's mother, a twisting of French and Italian bloodlines occurs. The *dénouement* retroactively illuminates the ambiguities. The "unequivocal," or unambiguous, aspect of the father's "foreignness, of Europeanism" brings closure to all those baffling mysteries of family history. For my argument where faces of oil or marble hold priority over faces of flesh and blood, it is the aim of Pierre and Isabel to be reconnected and to synthesize Isabel's French motherhood and Pierre's Italian fatherhood. Together, they merge to create what this American writer, Herman Melville, thought would capture the essence of classical beauty itself in a Franco-Italian love story.

2.4 Her Whole Form Sloped Sideways

Just as the previous section argued that a certain adoption of the look of the *Beatrice Cenci* painting was in some sense adopted by Melville to form the central moment of recognition and discovery between Pierre and Isabel at the Miss Pennies (i.e., the turn from anagnorisis to peripeteia in the Aristotelian tradition[53]), the end of the book channels visual art to form its closing image. After the art gallery, Pierre's frustrations and doubts grow until his mental state devolves to the point where he feels compelled to kill his cousin Glen Stanley. Taken to prison, Lucy and Isabel visit him. After hearing Isabel address Pierre as brother, Lucy dies a sudden death of shock before Pierre grabs a vial of poison Isabel is carrying around her neck before she herself finishes it—leaving us with this picture:

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[53] See Aristotle, *On the Art of Poetry with a Supplement on Music*, trans. S.H. Butcher (Library of Liberal Arts, 1956).

> "All's o'er, and ye know him not!" came gasping from the wall; and from the fingers of Isabel dropped an empty vial —as it had been a run-out sand-glass—and shivered upon the floor; and her whole form sloped sideways, and she fell upon Pierre's heart, and her long hair ran over him, and arbored him in ebon vines.[54]

The composition of the image is picturesque. It reminds one, indeed, of Luca Giordano using tenebristic lighting. Notice all the movement in relation to the human body—"from the fingers of Isabel dropped an empty vial," "her whole form sloped sideways," "her long hair ran over him," etc. A broad baroque-style can be seen as informing not only the selection of artworks that Melville cites in his book near the end with the *Bassin d'Encelade* and *Beatrice Cenci*, but it informs the *dénouement* image as well. Whether it was the moment of the glimpse at the Miss Pennies' house being a manifestation, a sort of adoption, of the Cenci look in the novel, the suicidal death swoon where the lovers' bodies become entangled is a baroque gem of art by Melville's own hand. The continuous theme is movement, diagonal movement, that is best represented by the form of a vine or a swirl. We see it in the turban of Beatrice Cenci herself, whose backward glancing head gives her body an axis that is s-shaped and suggests movement itself. We see it in the Enceladus sculpture where the body is writhing out of the earth. The final movement, however, in the book's own writhing state, romanticism as an artistic movement being a kind of writhingness of the soul, is a synthesis of France and Italy into two lovers dying into a picturesque image that possesses these same qualities of fine art that form the painterly pages of this delightful book.

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[54] Herman Melville, *Pierre; or, the Ambiguities* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1852), pp. 494–495.

3

THE AMERICAN ADAM IN *LEAVES OF GRASS*

3.1 Touch Not the Earth Barefoot

At the commencement of the first edition of *Leaves of Grass* there was no authorial signature on the title page. Instead, a a printing of a steel engraving was provided on the facing page. This decision tapped a deep reservoir of Western culture where, as English cultural critic Matthew Arnold (b. 1822–d. 1888) would put it, Hebraic textuality and Hellenic phenomena vie for priority in the artist's mind.[55] By fore-fronting the image in a textual production, Whitman signaled to his reader that his book of poetry would attempt to elevate the power of vision and, specifically, a vision of the classically formed body. The significance of this for an American author was that America's roots in Puritan theology had prevented the race from developing a fluency in the beautiful image. Hitherto, there had only been a native tradition of the sermonic text.[56] Neither was there, as art historian of the American nude William Gerdts has put it, an artistic tradition based on "the concept of bodily expressiveness and bodily perfection."[57] Whitman revolutionized American literature with the beautiful, humanistic image—in his case, the form and physicality of the male body—into cascading verses of poetry reaching Homeric heights. It remains one of the watershed events in American art and literary history.

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[55] Matthew Arnold, "Hebraism and Hellenism," *Culture and Anarchy: An Essay in Political and Social Criticism* (London: Smith, Elder, & Co., 16 Waterloo Place, 1889), pp. 91–92.

[56] Kenneth Murdock writes, "They [the Puritans] struggled with verse and aspired to poetry, even though they realized that poetry was an art. Cotton Mather, prescribing for candidates for the ministry, discusses music without hostility, and recommends both the reading and writing of poetry. He took pains to write his theory of prose style, and like other Puritan historians, tried to lay down rules for the writing of history, by no means leaving out of account its literary aspect. What is lacking among the Puritans is any whole-hearted or exclusive devotion to art in any form. For them other things in life came first." See Kenneth Murdock, "The Puritan Tradition," *The Reinterpretation of American Literature*, ed. Norman Foerster (New York: Russell and Russell, 1959), pp. 102–103.

The nominal sign of the author of *Leaves of Grass* would not come until midway through "Song of Myself" when the speaker announces himself as, "Walt Whitman, an American, one of the roughs / disorderly, fleshly, eating, and sensual."[58] This hedonistic grandstanding reveals a want on Whitman's part to distinguish himself from reigning definitions of the poet. The poet, for Whitman, was understood primarily as a figure of the genteel aristocracy—not to mention one who dressed like one too. Fashionable intellectual circles esteemed the usual suspects: the likes of Byron, Shelley, and Keats in Britain; Schiller, Goethe, and Fichte in Germany. Whitman's issue with the literati was that they represented a tradition divorced from native American traits and characteristics—most notably, the democratic ethos. It was an identitarian critique that clumped European poets together into a monolith. The critique, however, struck a chord deeper than the rote dichotomies of American democracy versus European aristocracy, or even American nature versus European culture, that we are all familiar with. The look of the male body, instead, came into focus in Whitman's poetic theory.[59]

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[57] William H. Gerdts*, The Great American Nude; A History in Art* (New York: Praeger, 1974), p. 9.

[58] Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass* (Brooklyn, New York: 1855), p. 29.

Before looking at Whitman's own comments on his poetic theory of the male body, let us start by looking at an anonymous review published in the London literary journal the *Critic* following *Leaves of Grass*' publication in 1855. It is a fascinating review that opens up a window into the dynamics between English literature abroad in Britain in the context of young America. It will help us contextualize the British-American rivalry in anglophone poetry from the opposing point of view across the pond. The anonymous reviewer in the *Critic* argues that, after reading *Leaves*

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[59] As I will discuss in more detail in section three of this chapter, my use of romantic here is part of a long and storied tradition in scholarship that juxtaposes the classical and romantic. While this dichotomy has no universally agreed upon definition, the merits of the terms are that they represent a real division in late eighteenth and nineteenth century discourse—and, for these thinkers, the terms operated as a transhistorical set of tendencies in temperaments in the humanities and arts. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, as recorded by his assistant Johann Peter Eckermann, provided a source for the pair of terms as a critical category of aesthetic discourse, tracing their origin to the romantic and neo-classical movements in Germany, which often had considerable overlap with one another: "The idea of the distinction between classical and romantic poetry, which is now spread over the whole world, and occasions so many quarrels and divisions, came originally from Schiller and myself. I laid down the maxim of objective treatment in poetry, and would allow no other; but Schiller, who worked quite in the subjective way, deemed his own fashion the right one, and to defend himself against me, wrote the treatise upon 'Naïve and Sentimental Poetry.' He proved to me that I myself, against my will, was romantic, and that my 'Iphigenia,' through the predominance of sentiment, was by no means so classical and so much in the antique spirit as some people supposed." Johann Peter Eckermann, *Conversations with Goethe, in the Last Years of His Life*, trans. S.M. Fuller (Boston: Hilliard, Gray, and Co., 1839), p. 467. See also Friedreich Schiller, *Naïve and Sentimental Poetry* and *On the Sublime*, trans. Julius A. Elias (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1966). For a more contemporary appropriation of these terms as a historiographical cleavage to make sense of art made during this epoch, see Kenneth Clark, *The Romantic Rebellion: Romantic versus Classical Art* (Programme Investments, 1973).

of Grass, Walt Whitman's lyrical art should be interpreted as a contest in masculine stature between the Old and New Worlds:

> If this work [*Leaves of Grass*] is really a work of genius—if the principles of those poems, their free language, their amazing and audacious egotism, their animal vigour, be real poetry and the divinest evidence of the true poet—then our studies have been in vain, and vainer still the homage which we have paid the monarchs of Saxon intellect, Shakespere, and Milton, and Byron. This Walt Whitman holds that his claim to be a poet lies in his robust and rude health. He is, in fact, as he declares, 'the poet of the body.' Adopt this theory, and Walt Whitman is a Titan; Shelley and Keats the merest pigmies.[60]

The critic warns the British poets that they lack the sort of Adamic romanticism that R.W.B. Lewis has argued penetrated American poetics in the antebellum period.[61] The "monarchs of Saxon intellect," drawing on the language of the Revolution, are to be overthrown by the American Walt Whitman for their privileged position as aristocratic gatekeepers of the English tongue. According to one theory propounded in the grandiose preface to *Leaves of Grass*, "innocence and nakedness" are to be taken up such as existed in prelapsarian Eden—hurling America into the supreme position of future poetry through a repatriation into a

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[60] Kenneth M. Price, ed. "*Critic* [London] 15 (1 April 1856), 170-1," *Walt Whitman: The Contemporary Reviews* (Cambridge UP, 1996), p. 46.

[61] R.W.B. Lewis, *The American Adam: Innocence, Tragedy, and Tradition in the Nineteenth Century* (University of Chicago Press, 1955). Whitman's adoption of the figure of Adam is most famous in the cluster of poems titled *Enfans d'Adam.*

Virgilian idyll.[62] Or, as Whitman himself puts it in a moment of sustained gravitas:[63]

> But to speak in literature with the perfect rectitude and insouciance of the movements of animals and the unimpeachableness of the sentiment of trees in the woods and grass by the roadside is the flawless triumph of art. If you have looked on him who has achieved it you have looked on one of the masters of the artists of all nations and times .... The greatest poet has less a marked style and is more the channel of thoughts and things without increase or diminution, and is the free channel of himself. He swears to his art, I will not be meddlesome, I will not have in my writing any elegance or effect or originality to hang in the way between me and the rest like curtains. I will have nothing hang in the way, not the richest curtains .... You shall stand by my side and look in the mirror with me.[64]

Whitman's theory of poetry, while hugging onto the belief that United States was a sort of blank slate in human history (i.e., its principal advantage over Europe), more importantly posited that poems ought to be read as physiological traces of their author. In other words, a categorical difference should be detectable between a Whitman and a Keats verse because the training and discipline of the body of the poet would have influenced decisions in syntax, subject matter, and word-choice. For Whitman, it was his unique brand of free verse with operatic chants of idiomatic speech that minds of aristocratic refinement nor democratic vulgarity could access. It informs the peculiar strain of anti-intellectualism and the atavistic edge of *Leaves of Grass*' compositional fiber while still maintaining the threads of fine art. Toward the end of "Song of Myself" in the 1855 edition, the speaker announces, "I am the teacher of athletes / He that by me spreads a wider breast than my own proves the width of my own."[65] The implication being that an athletic literature would do away with aristocratic costume and present the male body's lines and musculature in a way that a Keats, Shelley, Goethe, and the rest of the dapper entourage, had failed to do. Whitman gestures to this idea in his preface when stating that, "I will have nothing hang in the way, not the richest curtains"—suggesting all expensive drapery will be discarded for the flesh alone, or, as he says a few lines later, "Exaggerations will be revenged in human physiology."[66]

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[62] Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass* (Brooklyn, New York: 1855), p. vii.

[63] See also Whitman's essay on language, "An American Primer," written in the 1850s, though unpublished, in which he argues for the superiority of American letters. Walt Whitman, "An American Primer," ed. Horace Traubel (Boston: Small, Maynard and Company, 1904). Virgil is mentioned as a analogue to Whitman primarily because of *Georgics* and *Eclogues*. See Virgil, *Eclogues, Georgics, Aeneid I–VI* (London: William Heinemann; New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons), 1916. Virgil's epitaph, "Mantua me genuit; Calabri rapuere; tenet nunc Parthenope. Cecini pascua, rura, duces," ends with, in English, "*I sang of pastures, fields, and leaders*." Given Whitman's emphasis on democracy, though sharing Virgil's rural settings, he may deserve the epitaph, "Cecini pascua, rura, populos."

[64] Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass* (Brooklyn, New York: 1855), p. vii.

By erecting the image of the genteel aristocratic clothed in expensive drapery as a sort of arch-nemesis, Whitman tees up the classical male nude to emerge out of the pastoral paradise of Eden that he recognized as framing the tissue of the American character. For more direct evidence of this fact, let us look at Whitman advertising *Leaves of Grass* as such in another self-review titled "Walt Whitman and His Poems" from *The United States Review* published in 1855. Here was Whitman's most brilliant gambit in self-promotion:

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[65] Ibid., p. 52.

[66] Ibid., p. vii.; Ibid., p. ix.

> AN American bard at last! One of the roughs, large, proud, affectionate, eating, drinking, and breeding, his costume manly and free, his face sunburnt and bearded, his postures strong and erect, his voice bringing hope and prophecy to the generous races of young and old. We shall cease shamming and be what we really are. We shall start an athletic and defiant literature. We realize now how it is, and what was most lacking. The interior American republic shall also be declared free and independent.
>
> For all our intellectual people, followed by their books, poems, novels, essays, editorials, lectures, tuitions, and criticism, dress by London and Paris modes, receive what is received there, obey the authorities, settle disputes by the old tests, keep out of rain and sun, retreat to the shelter of houses and schools, trim their hair, shave, touch not the earth barefoot, and enter not the sea except in a complete bathing-dress.[67]

This passage crystallizes how Whitman was waging a battle between drapery and the nude as a conflict in the interpretation of human beauty. The embrace of a "costume manly and free," as noted in this review, suggests a beautiful man would, in some sense, be nude—and, as we see here and throughout the rest of his poetry, hairy. After rejecting "dress by London and Paris modes," Whitman invokes a constellation of hirsute descriptions of the male body—rejecting those who "trim their hair, shave." It reminds us of the significance of those pictures of Whitman with his shirt collar unbuttoned to have his chest hair spill out—

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[67] Kenneth M. Price, ed. "'Walt Whitman and His Poems.' *The United States Review 5* (September 1855), 205–212," *Walt Whitman: The Contemporary Reviews* (Cambridge UP, 1996), p. 8.

matching his bird's nest-like facial and head hair.[68] The significance of judging male beauty according to biological properties, like hair, rather than artificial drapery, such as silk, was that it touched the heart of Whitman's sensibility as a tactile poet of the body. In this schema, clothing was a barrier and obstacle to the divine flesh.

Whitman's theory of male beauty in the first edition of *Leaves of Grass*, thus, was an experiment in what Whitman called "an athletic literature"—a literature that disregarded clothes and artificial drapery for a costume of the classicized nude. The male nude was chosen simply because Whitman envisioned himself as such for his quest to be a primitive bard. M.H. Abrams described poetry in the romantic period in his *Mirror and the Lamp* as the gushing forth, fountain, or lamp-like, of the self—that is, of the poet illuminating their own interiority rather than mimetically imitating the external world.[69] Recall the very first scene of *Leaves of Grass* where the speaker descends to a bank by the wood to become "undisguised and naked." Here, the speaker, like a true romantic, illuminates his surroundings through physiological dips and climbs:

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[68] While there are dozens of photographs of Whitman available, the one I am thinking of is the carte-de-visite that Civil War photographer Matthew Brady (b. 1822–d. 1896) took of Whitman at the age of forty-three around 1862. Whitman, talking to Horace Traubel in the year 1888, said that, "I always rather favored it," and that, to him, it had "a sort of Moses in the burning bush look." See Horace Traubel, "Friday, June 15, 1888," *With Walt Whitman in Camden, Vol. 1* (New York: Roman and Littlefield, Inc., 1961), p. 335.

[69] "The change from imitation to expression, and from the mirror to the fountain, the lamp, and related analogues, was not an isolated phenomenon. It was an integral part of a corresponding change in popular epistemology—that is, in the concept of the role played by the mind in perception which was current among romantic poets and critics. And the movement from eighteenth- to early nineteenth-century schemes of the mind and its place is nature is indicated by a mutation of metaphors almost exactly parallel to that in contemporary discussion of the nature of art." M.H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition* (Oxford University Press, 1953), p. 57.

I will go to the bank by the wood and become undisguised
and naked,
I am mad for it to be in contact with me.
The smoke of my own breath,
Echos, ripples, and buzzed whispers . . . . loveroot,
silkthread, crotch and vine,
My respiration and inspiration . . . . the beating of my
heart . . . . the passing of blood and air through my
lungs,
The sniff of green leaves and dry leaves, and of the shore
and darkcolored sea-rocks, and of hay in the barn,
The sound of the belched words of my voice . . . . words
loosed to the eddies of the wind,
A few light kisses . . . . a few embraces . . . . a reaching
around of arms,
The play of shine and shade on the trees as the supple
boughs wag,
The delight alone or in the rush of the streets, or along the
fields and hillsides,
The feeling of health . . . . the full-noon trill . . . . the song
of me rising from bed and meeting the sun.[70]

Descent is a powerful trope in literature. To descend, especially in the epic tradition from Homer to Milton, is typically a descent into the underworld or hell.[71] *Leaves of Grass*, operating in this tradition, begins with a descent into a secluded place where the speaker can, paradoxically, do something private (i.e., undress) only to advertise it publicly in his book of poetry. Notice all the uses of the word "I," "my," "me," etc. It is a kind of performative, private nudity where the lines between nakedness/shame and nudity/beauty are exhibited in order to be renegotiated in an American context. By undressing to introduce I, the speaker throws on a nude costume that persists throughout the entire book of poetry. In order to read this book, the reader is forced to make a decision whether they are willing to face the speaker's nude body —issuing a challenge to the Protestant set of morals that had censored the beautiful image of the nude for quite some time. A sort of merge happens, too, when the undraped body enters the natural world; it becomes one with the sunlight, the grass, the open air, the water, etc.

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[70] Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass* (Brooklyn, New York: 1855), p. 13.

[71] One thinks of the beginning of Dante's *Inferno* when, descending into the underworld with Virgil, encountering the famous inscription at the gate of hell: "Lasciate ogne Speranza, voi ch'intrate" (*abandon hope all ye who enter here*). Perhaps the most famous descent to the underworld in the epic tradition, however, is Aeneas descent into Hades to visit his father, Anchises, to learn of Rome's fate.

3.2 The Unclothed Body, Diviner Still, is Fully Divine

Whitman, always wanting to merge art and life, fashioned a lifestyle that attempted to be a reflection of his own published recommendations—again, merging text and body in what forms the pinnacle crux of Whitman's poetic theory. The end goal of these lifestyle recommendations was a kind of pure sensory experience—a sense of aliveness that radiated, as Whitman was prone to say, "presence."[72] Whitman's notion of presence was based in the idea that a human being, if trained properly, could be a sort of magnetic, attractive force just through being physically grand in a moment in time and space. This idea and the success of its effects on passersby is recorded by Whitman's eyewitness accounts; one of the most stunning of these accounts is featured in an excerpt provided by John Addington Symonds:

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[72] In the expanded 1856 edition of *Leaves of Grass*, the poem "Song of the Road" includes the line, "I and mine do not convince by arguments, similes, rhymes, / We convince by our presence." Whitman would continue to use this idea of presence to communicate an idea of the whole person as a Nietzschean sort of will to power in the always fluctuating world. Walt Whitman, "Song of the Road," *Leaves of Grass* (Brooklyn, New York, 1856), p. 233.

> Walt's Whitman's dress was always extremely plain. He usually wore in pleasant weather a light-grey suit of good woolen cloth. The only thing peculiar about his dress was that he had no necktie at any time, and always wore shirts with very large turn-down collars, the button at the neck some five or six inches lower than usual, so that the throat and upper part of the breast were exposed. In all other respects he dressed in a substantial, neat, plain, common way. Everything he wore, and everything about him, was always scrupulously clean. His clothes might (and often did) show signs of wear, or they might be torn or have holes worn in them; but they never looked soiled. Indeed, an exquisite aroma of cleanliness has always been one of the special features of the man; it has always belonged to his clothes, his breath, his whole body, his eating and drinking, his conversation, and no one could know him for an hour without seeing that it penetrated his mind and life, and was in fact the expression of a purity which was physical as much as moral, and moral as much as physical.[73]

The curation of a style that conjured thoughts of health, strength, beauty, all connected to the male form and body, was intentionally crafted by Whitman. It formed the spine to his poetry and writings, and it formed the basis of his own lifestyle. Retrospectively, for the critic, it raises the all-important issue of Whitman's intense "cult of self," as Baudelaire would phrase it when discussing the nineteenth century's emergence of the dandy as a distinct personality type.[74] While the space is not permitted to discuss it here, Whitman's curated self-image certainly has strong historical connections with figures of male beauty such as Beau Brummel in the nineteenth century.[75]

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[73] John Addington Symonds, *Walt Whitman, A Study* (London: John C. Nimmo, 1893), pp. xvi–xvii.

Whitman's "plain" style of dress, as mentioned only a few seconds ago, however, has a more direct line of causality than the broad social category of the dandy. Whitman's Quaker inheritance is much more of an obvious contributing factor to Whitman's notion of purity which influenced both his style of dress, his mode of idiomatic speech, and so forth. The significance of this for Whitman's turn to the male nude is that it is as if Whitman took the Quaker end-goal of purity to its logical extreme, in a system of thought that attempted to erase all forms of hierarchy, one would have to get rid of artificially manufactured signs of distinction and difference. The principal effect of clothes is precisely to create a sense of distinction and difference based on something artificially manufactured and adorned on the body. This explains the tradition in Quakerism of protesting naked from the seventeenth century onward that historians have documented.[76] The symbolic logic of the naked protest is that by putting on the most egalitarian form of dress (i.e., nakedness), these protesting Quakers were publicly communicating their devotion to the divine. In other words, the stripping of the veil of this world for the divine is analogized to the stripping of clothes for the flesh of the body. In rereading the preface to *Leaves of Grass*, this tradition of protesting naked as a symbol of divinity suggests itself when, "The innocence and nakedness are resumed … they are neither modest or immodest …. It is also not consistent with the reality of the soul to admit that there is anything in the known universe more divine than men and women."[77] If one takes the idea seriously that men and women are divine, and that nakedness was the original dress before sin made Adam and Eve cover themselves with shame, then the most beautiful outfit for humans would be the unclothed body—if it was indeed made in the image of God. It is a principle of thought that fluttered through the Italian Renaissance, creating pieces of art such as the male nude *Adam* by Tullio Lombardo now housed in The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. By presenting

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[74] Charles Baudelaire, "The Painter of Modern Life," *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*, trans. Jonathan Mayne (London and New York: Phaidon, 1965), p. 27.

[75] See Doreen Yarwood's statement on the dandy's emergence in the early nineteenth-century in her chapter "1800–1830, Classicism to Romanticism": "The years 1800–1830 were those which established the English gentleman as the best-dressed and best-mannered in Europe. The noted English elegants of these years, imperturbable, ironic, graceful, were models for aristocratic bearing and behaviour. Best known of these dandies was George Bryan Brummel (1778–1840). Reputed since his youth as extremely fastidious in dress, he deeply impressed the Prince Regent who sponsored him to become a leading light in Brighton society. However, there was nothing flamboyant about his dress. 'Beau' Brummell wore garments in subtly coloured fabrics with a minimum of decoration, but these were superbly cut and made. Typical was his blue tailcoat with brass buttons worn over a fawn waistcoat accompanied by light-coloured buckskin pantaloons and elegant black boots. For evening wear his waistcoat was white and pantaloons of blue stockinet strapped over black slippers. He certainly helped to popularize the wearing of trousers instead of knee breeches." See Doreen Yarwood, *Fashion in the Western World, 1500–1900* (London: B.T. Batsford, 1992), p. 83. A major statement on the dandy came through the hand of Thomas Carlyle (b. 1795–d. 1881) in his book *Sartor Resartus* (1834) in the named chapter "The Dandiacal Body." Carlyle defines the dandy as a "Clothes-wearing Man," saying, "First, touching Dandies, let us consider, with some scientific strictness, what a Dandy specially is. A Dandy is a Clothes-wearing Man, a Man whose trade, office and existence consists in the wearing of Clothes. Every faculty of his soul, spirit, purse and person is heroically consecrated to this one object, the wearing of Clothes wisely and well: so that as others dress to live, he lives to dress." Thomas Carlyle, *Sartor Resartus; The Life and Opinions of Herr Teufelsdrockh* (Boston: James Munroe and Company, 1846), p. 119.

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[76] Kenneth L. Carroll, "Early Quakers and 'Going Naked as a Sign'," *Quaker History,* vol. 67, no. 2, 1978, p. 69-87.

[77] Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass* (Brooklyn, New York: 1855), pp. vii–viii.

Adam in such, as John Milton would say in *Paradise Lost*, "naked Majestie," the artist with Judeo-Christian heritage has attempted to image the unpolluted flesh as beautiful in prelapsarian Eden.[78] Whitman, in this sense, is very much operating in the Renaissance tradition of giving glory to the nude form in a Judeo-Christian context, using classical-pagan formulae with modern Christian content.[79] Here is Whitman limning the body as such in the fifth poem in *Leaves of Grass* where the speaker announces,

> The expression of a wellmade man appears not only in his face,
> It is in his limbs and joints also …. it is curiously in the joints of his hips and wrists,

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[78] In book four, after Adam and Eve have been created, Satan has entered the garden of Eden disguised as a bird. Relishing in the garden's bliss, Satan observes the first two humans and lovers: "From this Assyrian Garden, where the Fiend / Saw undelighted all delight, all kind / Of living Creatures new to sight and strange: / Two of far nobler shape erect and tall, / Godlike erect, with native Honour clad / In naked Majestie seemed Lords of all, / And worthie seemd, for in their looks Divine / The image of their glorious maker shon, / Truth, Wisdome, Sanctitude severe and pure." John Milton, *Paradise Lost. A Poem Written in Ten Books* (London: Peter Parker, 1667), Book 4, lines 285–293.

[79] The synthesis of Christian subject matter with classical form is executed most clearly in the representation of the male body in Michelangelo. Consider his statue *David* (c. 1504). While depicting a story from the Bible, the contrapposto stance and muscular architecture of David's torso is unquestionably Greek in origin. Michelangelo's favorite sculpture, in fact, was the Belvedere Torso, a fragmented male nude statue signed by "Apollonios, son of Nestor, Athenian" from the first or second century BCE, that was excavated in Rome in the 1430s. Michelangelo's adoration earned it the nickname "The School of Michelangelo." The torso is thought to depict Ajax or Hercules, though the statue's fragmentary state makes it difficult to decipher. Despite his love for the classical male form, Michelangelo remained a devout Catholic for his entire life—illustrating the peculiar blend of paganism and Christianity in Rome, a city with so many layers of history. For a fuller discussion, see James Hall, *Michelangelo and the Reinvention of the Human Body* (Pimlico, 2006).

> It is in his walk .. the carriage of his neck .. the flex of his
> waist and knees …. Dress does
> not hide him.[80]

In an unpublished preface to *Leaves of Grass* written in 1864, Whitman writes a very interesting paragraph that seems to capture the spirit of the male nude that undergirds the composition of his book of poetry first published in 1855. Here, Whitman pictures himself nude in front of a mirror, arguing that "facial physiognomy" has been overly represented in poetry in his day and age. This critique is highly unusual, but, if we give it a chance, we discover many truths underlying it. The critique is leveled at the perceptual framework in the United States that elevated portraiture to such an esteemed status in the milieu. A chain of interests congregates around the face when speculating on its significance: the art practice of portraiture was bolstered by the sciences of physiognomy and phrenology. Why did the face generate such profound interest? An inflection point is surely Charles Le Brun, the *premier peintre de roi* to King Louis XIV and the director of Academie de Peintre de Sculpture, who delivered an influential lecture series on physiognomy in 1670.[81] The founder of the scientific practice of physiognomy likewise was Johann Caspar Lavater who mentions in his book *Physiognomische Fragmente* that what initially excited his interest was his hobby of portrait painting.[82] Whitman's first publisher for *Leaves of Grass*, too, Fowler and Wells, did much to disseminate the ideas of phrenology through their publications.[83] While a singular reason for the face and head's rise to such prominence in both the arts and sciences in difficult to identify, though there is certainly something very modern about it, we can understand Whitman's frustration with how the perceptual framework of sartorial portraiture, if we can call it that, ignores training the eye to appreciate the rest of the body and its fleshly parts. If one has grown up their whole life only seeing art represent the face as evidence of the flesh in portraiture, physiognomy, phrenology, etc., it makes sense why Whitman would conclude that the only way to artistically liberate the human form would be a total undraping:

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[80] Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass* (Brooklyn, New York: 1855), p. 77.

[81] Le Brun's lectures, along with the many physiognomic drawings featured in his presentations, that were delivered to the Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture in Paris in 1668, were gathered together and first published in Paris in 1698. A reprint of the London edition from 1734 by the translator John Williams is available in many libraries today. See Charles Le Brun, *A Method to Learn to Design the Passions*, reprint, trans. John Williams (Los Angeles: University of California, 1980).

> Prevalent poems cast back only facial physiognomy, a part. In the following chant, the apparition of the whole form, as of one unclothed before a mirror is cast back. The teachers of the day teach (and stop there) that the unclothed face is divine. It is indeed; but I say that only the unclothed body, diviner still, is fully divine.[84]

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[82] See the section "On Portrait Painting" in John Caspar Lavater, *Essays on Physiognomy; Designed to Promote the Knowledge and the Love of Mankind*, third edition (London: B. Blake, 13, Bell Yard, Temple Bar, 1840), pp. 170–178.

[83] The Fowler and Wells Company published and founded the phrenological periodical *American Phrenological Journal and Miscellany*, running from 1838 to 1911. They were heavily involved in Whitman's early publishing career, publishing the second edition of *Leaves of Grass* (1856). Whitman himself published works in another one of their magazines which eventually merged with the *American Phrenological Journal* called *Life Illustrated*. To examine one of their volumes, see O.S. Fowler, *Fowler's Practical Phrenology* (New York: Fowler and Wells, Phrenological Cabinet, 131 Nassau Street, 1850).

[84] Clifton Joseph Furness, *Walt Whitman's Workshop: A Collection of Unpublished Manuscripts* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1928), pp. 128–129.

Again, directing his ire at the overly clothed poets, Whitman suggests that poets have only limned "facial physiognomy" in their verses. Whitman, taking the bold step to undrape his own body, takes the risk of asserting that he will revolutionize American letters by restyling how people perceive the flesh. By putting the flesh of the body *in summa* in his poem as Whitman presents a new form of fashion for the human body. By using his own body for this experiment, Whitman sacrifices his self for, what he perceives to be, the beautification of his country. It is a democratic idea of the beautiful image because *all* persons have a body and, because of that body, a soul. As the professed poet of the body and American democracy, imaging that body is the first step into recognizing the soul, according to Whitman.[85]

3.3 The Lush and the Weird

To end this chapter, I would like to turn briefly to Whitman's contemporary, another celebrated poet from the nineteenth-century: Edgar Allan Poe. The reasons for this on a chapter on the art of undress in *Leaves of Grass* in 1855 are manifold: Poe was a popular poet in his day and age; "The Raven" was truly the first national sensation of verse, spurring all sorts of parodies, spin offs, and recitations;[86] Poe's reputation as a poet of the weird and the unordinary sharply contrasted with Whitman's optimism and celebratory mode. Whitman's emphasis on health and strength to the male body's beauty, too, presented the flip side of Poe's frequent use of the emaciated and sickly body—such as the terminally ill states of Roderick and Madeleine Usher in "The Fall of the House of Usher."[87] This divergence in stylistics can be contextualized by turning to the distinction between the classical and romantic. It is an important dichotomy in art and literary history. The source of their definitions, in a post-romantic age, is from the *Sturm und Drang* movement in German in the late eighteenth century. These poets attempted to achieve a synthesis of the classical and the romantic even as romanticism's forward momentum eventually took the upper hand. Goethe, a leading participant in the *Strum und Drang* movement, identified the contrast as a difference in what he named "Das Klassische und das Romantische." Goethe's formula was: "Das Klassische nenne ich das Gesunde und das Romantische das Kranke" (*What is classical is healthy; what is romantic is sick*).[88] If we accept, briefly, Goethe's formulation that romantic literature is a tendency toward the sickly and classical literature a tendency toward the healthy, we can make some important observations and statements on Whitman and Poe. It will afford us a smooth runaway into the next chapter where we will discuss, specifically, Whitman's awareness and appropriation of the imagery of Greek statuary and the classical gymnasium into his *Manly Health and Training* series, where health is the all-important virtue underlying the system.

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[85] Whitman, in "Song of Myself," famously announces, "I am the poet of the body, / And I am the poet of the soul." Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass* (Brooklyn, New York: 1855), p. 26. Moreover, in the 1856 edition of *Leaves of Grass*, Whitman would begin asking the question at the beginning of the poem that would eventually be titled "I Sing the Body Electric," "And if the body were not the soul, what is the soul?" Whitman's attempt to bridge the transcendent and the flesh, the physical and the metaphysical, is a problem as old as time itself. Whitman's worship of the body leads him to the very Greek conclusion that the body is a reflection of the inner soul. Walt Whitman, "7–Poem of the Body," *Leaves of Grass* (Brooklyn, New York, 1856), p. 167. See also Johann Gottfried Herder who would ask a similar quesion in his essay, "Is the Beauty of the Body a Herald of the Beauty of the Soul?", *Selected Writings on Aesthetics* (Princeton University Press, 2009), pp. 31–40.

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[86] For instance, the Edgar Allan Poe Society of Baltimore lists at least sixty-two reprints between 1845, the year it was first published in the *American Review* by editor George Hooker Colton, and 1849—the year of Poe's death. Capitalizing on the poem's success, Poe published the "Philosophy of Composition" in 1846 in which Poe analyzes the poem line-by-line, with the pretense that every decision down to the syllable was the result of careful and calculated reason on his part. See Edgar Allan Poe, *The Best Known Works of Edgar Allan Poe in One Volume: Poems, Tales, Essays, Criticisms*, ed. Hervey Allen (New York: Blue Ribbon books, 1927), pp. 812–819.

[87] Ibid., pp. 273–286.

[88] Goethe made this statement to his secretary Johann Eckermann in his *Conversations with Goethe* (Gespräche mit Goethe) first published in German in 1836. See Johann Peter Eckermann, "Thursday, 2d April," *Conversations with Goethe in the Last Years of His Life*, trans. S.M. Fuller (Boston: Hilliard, Gray, and Company, 1839, p. 285.

Earlier, brief mention was made to Charles Baudelaire's discussion of the dandy in his essay "The Painter of Modern Life." It was suggested that Whitman, though outwardly rejecting the dandy's sartorialism for a costume of the nude, nonetheless himself contained aspects of the dandy in his heightened interest in male beauty and exhibitionism. To be more accurate, now that we have the space to discuss it: Whitman rejected the flaneur's susceptibility to devolve into the stereotypical character of the *poete maudit*—or, the poet on the margins of society, one who is economically precarious, tortured, depressed, and spent out of luck. In terms of classical and romantic aesthetics, which, as just mentioned, Goethe defined simply as a difference between health and sickness, Whitman places himself on the classical end of the spectrum. Whitman never had a great deal of money and only bought himself his first house when he was in his sixth decade. In this sense, one may have suspected him to be a thorough romantic. Yet, Whitman's optimism and passion for exuding vitality and a life-force of encouragement prevented him from falling into the rutters of the poete maudit's existence on the margins. It is why when it came to judging his own work with Poe's, Whitman had these words to say:

> The lush and the weird that have taken such extraordinary possession of Nineteenth century verse-lovers—what mean they? The inevitable tendency of poetic culture to morbidity, abnormal beauty—the sickliness of all technical

> thought or refinement in itself—the abnegation of the perennial and democratic concretes at first hand, the body, the earth and sea, sex and the like—and the substitution of something for them at second or third hand—what bearings have they on current pathological study?[89]

If one takes this idea and revisits the radical swerve from Whitman's first novels in the 1840s to the 1855 first edition of *Leaves of Grass*, they see this turn away from sickness, crime, and death toward a celebration of life, beauty, the outdoors, athleticism, and health. One must wonder whether Whitman heard Poe's "The Raven" being recited in the streets of New York in 1845, being turned off by the haunting refrain of "Nevermore." If we look at the gothic strain of letters in the United States, not only in Poe, but in Charles Brockden Brown too, we see a strong distinction between the light and the dark in comparison to Whitman's poetry. Whitman's poetry, so prone to the love of the sunshine, has little of, what Harry Levin termed, *the power of blackness*. That strain of horror that forms the kernel of tales like Nathaniel Hawthorne's "Young Goodman Brown" is absent in Emerson's ephebe. Even a poem such as "The Sleepers," which is fascinated by both death and night alike, has a vibrant life-force which sees beauty and optimistic light in the macabre. Whitman's refusal of the negative affects of disease and the like, of course, has its ramifications. Perhaps a democratic poetry must be based on the negative. The notion that all humans have sicknesses and pathologies is perhaps a more inclusive universalizing claim than that all humans are athletes and can relish in the sunlight in nature in an assertion of their corporeal vitality. *Memento mori* or *memento vivere*? Whitman's poetry must be called renaissance, classical, and not gothic or romantic, because of this impulse to celebrate the vitality of the body versus the decay into the shadow of death.[90] Against Poe's claim that "the death of a beautiful woman" constitutes the most poetical topic in the world, we can say at the conclusion of this chapter, that the Whitmanian beautiful and healthy man, "undisguised and naked" in nature, is a counter, classically formed muse for the art of poesy in American romanticism.

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[89] Walt Whitman, "Edgar Poe's Significance," *Specimen Days*, in *Complete Prose Works* (Philadelphia: David McKay, 1892), p. 158.

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[90] The case of Poe versus Whitman is illustrative in this discussion of romantic and classical aesthetics in American literature precisely because we see these dominant currents emerge so clearly. Poe's fascination with gothic tropes of European castles, and the decay of aristocratic lineage, such as in the "Fall of the House of Usher," is in such strong contrast to Whitman's step into the woods to "become undisguised and naked" and sing his song "at the morning sun" in "Song of Myself." Madeleine and Roderick's emaciated sickliness and the speaker of *Leaves of Grass*'s radiant Apollonian calm and vitality creates such a strong contrast in poetic subject matter and a radically different vision of the body in relationship to that subject matter.

4

OLYMPIAN BODY AND SOUL IN *MANLY HEALTH AND TRAINING*

4.1 Antebellum Hellenism

The Greeks pose a great problem for the Western world because of their cult of male beauty. While the Greeks are championed for laying the foundations of Western civilization with breakthroughs in law, medicine, and architecture, to just name a few, the attitude toward male beauty is a point that is often overlooked. For poets like Walt Whitman, however, the cult of beauty surrounding the male Greek athlete was the society's crown jewel. In Whitman's *Manly Health and Training* written in 1858, we see Whitman extol classical male beauty in the ancient Greek man. Here, Whitman makes his classicism clear—endorsing the Greeks' worship of the male form and its athleticism as the most serene force in nature. However, before discussing Whitman's own brand of philhellenism, we would be wise to review the reputation the ancient Greeks had in antebellum America.

The most clearcut influence of Hellenistic civilization on America was its architecture. Greek Revival architecture was adopted by Southern plantation owners. Aristocratic planters sought to model their plantation homes on ancient temples. Millford Plantation (c. 1841, South Carolina) and Belle Grove Plantation (c. 1857, Louisiana) are two of many models of this trend in architecture during this roughly thirty year period.[91] The Southerners saw in ancient Hellas a group of city states united by confederation where property owning men were able to balance a principle of self-government with slave labor. The temple-esque character that these planters designed in their mansions was an opportunity to symbolize their authority. In a country that was based in the overthrow of the monarchical systems of Europe, the Southern planters were one group that still held onto their European past in terms of aristocratic governance. Besides architecture, another area of interest as it concerned the Greeks was its literature. Learning Greek was an essential part of a classical education. Rhetoric and philosophy were the domains of Plato, Aristotle, and Cicero; Sophocles, Aeschylus, and Euripides were the masters of drama; Homer was the bard of the epic; the original New Testament was written in Greek. Plutarch's *Lives of the Greeks and Romans* was a staple of the curriculum.[92] For political advice, Rome was preferred. John Adams modeled his life off Cicero; Washington was the American Cincinnatus. Educated Americans laced their writings and speeches with Latin phrases.

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[91] See Chapter 8 "The Provincial Greek Revival: In the Old South" in Talbot Hamlin, *Greek Revival Architecture in America* (Ohio University Press, 1944), pp. 187-217.

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[92] See for instance the diary entry found by for a Princeton student in the eighteenth century, "At seven in the morning we recite to the president lessons in the works of Xenophon in Greek and Watt's Ontology. The rest of the morning until dinner time (11 a.m.) we have a recitation on Cicero's De Oratore and Hebrew grammar. The remaining part of the day we spend in the study of Xenophon and ontology in preparation for the recitation the next morning and besides these things we dispute once a week after the sylogistic method and now and then we study geography." See James J. Walsh, *Eduaction of the Founding Fathers of the Republic: Scholasticism in the Colonial Colleges* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1935), p. 154.

Many of the state mottoes, including the national one, are Latin inscriptions.[93]

4.2 Greek Athletes

The significance of Whitman's comments on the Greek statues in his health and training manual is twofold. For one, significance was rarely given to them by Americans—Greek appreciation occured primarily through architecture and literature. Two, Whitman almost never mentions classical antiquity, nor anything bookish, in his oeuvre. As the poet of democracy, he was always avoiding jargon that might sound like it came from the ivory tower. Whitman's appeal, to what he called his "barbaric yawp," was a deliberate attempt to sound like "one of the roughs."[94] Thus, Whitman's comments on ancient Greece in his health and training are truly significant. Unlike a student at Dartmouth or Harvard, Whitman is far less interested in translating a passage by Demosthenes in its original Attic dialect and much more interested in championing the beauty of the Greek athlete. Whitman's antitype, we could say, is Edward Everett—the president of Harvard's classics department that could conjugate every Greek second declension noun.[95]

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[93] It is easy to overlook the significance of Greek and Latin languages as centerpieces for early instruction of boys and young men. The classical languages as a keystone of education was inherited from the scholasticism of the middle ages and brought to New England through Oxford and Cambridge in England. Consider Samuel Elison Morison's comment that, "Although every Elizabethan grammar school had individual features, there is a striking sameness in the curricula, which consisted exclusively of Latin and Greek. For the most part, an English grammar scholar spent seven years in school without a scrap of mathematics, georgraphy, history; or any modern language. The object of the curriculum was to make him completely at home in reading, writing, and speaking Latin as a living language and to give him a good start in Greek; nothing else mattered. Such as what the founders of New England understood to be the proper secondary education of a boy." See Samuel Eliot Morison, *The Intellectual Life of Colonial New England* (New York University Press, 1956), p. 88.

[94] Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass* (Brooklyn, New York: 1855), p. 55, p. 29.

It is important context that Whitman lived and worked in New York City beginning with his move there as a young boy in 1823 until he left to be a field-aid in the Civil War in 1862. New York City was, without question, the most vibrant and active metropolis in the country. A major development occured in 1803 when Minister to France, Robert R. Livingston, was able to import a collection of plaster casts for the newly established New York Academy of Fine Arts from the Louvre.[96] These were the first casts of Greek and Roman sculptures to arrive in America. While there is no direct evidence, to date, of Whitman visiting places in New York where these sculpture were held, the comments in his *Manly Health and Training* manual suggests some familiarity with having seen them. Whitman famously never traveled outside the United States, so his knowledge of these statues would have had to come from either seeing them in person or printed into books.

For Whitman, the classical male form embodied all of the principles of human excellence—health, strength, cleanliness, vitality, and proportion—that the statues are designed to reflect. In Whitman's sixth installment of his health and training manual on October 17, 1858, he provides a section on the benefits of "Swimming and Bathing" and connects them with the ancient models that the sculptors used for their statues:

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[95] Everett, one of the premier orators of the period, taught ancient Greek at Harvard as one of his jobs. He was the keynote speaker at the ceremony for the opening of Gettysburg National Cemetery in 1863 before President Lincoln gave his famous remarks.

[96] See James K. McNutt, "Plaster Casts after Antique Sculpture: Their Role in the Elevation of Public Taste and in American Art Instruction," *Studies in Art Education*, vol. 31, no. 3, 1990, pp. 158–67.

> The sculptors say that the ample development which the muscles, trunk, lungs, &c., obtained in the regular swimming, (in the open waters, or the large baths,) of the Greeks and Romans, gave their chests that round and full form so noticeable in their statues.[97]

Whitman's brand of Hellenism attributes the beauty of the Greek and Roman statues to the gymnasium and to exercises such as swimming. This attribution has a direct precedent in the pioneering work of the German art historian, Johann Joachim Winckelmann. Winckelmann, as the prime mover of Hellenism in the eighteenth century, had a resounding impact on Western art history through his erudite writings on art. In his breakthrough treatise published soon after becoming the Vatican's librarian, *Reflections on the Imitation of the Greek Works in Sculpture and Painting*, he lays the seeds for Whitman's comments when writing,

> The Gymnasies, where, sheltered by public modesty, the youths exercised themselves naked, were the schools of art. These the philosopher frequented, as well as the artist. *Socrates* for the instruction of a Charmides, Autolycus, Lysis; *Phidias* for the improvement of his art by their beauty. Here he studied the elasticity of the muscles, the ever varying motions of the frame, the outlines of fair forms, or the Contour left by the young wrestler on the sand. Here beautiful nakedness appeared with such a liveliness of expression, such truth and variety of situations,

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[97] Walt Whitman, *Manly Health and Training: To Teach the Science of a Sound and Beautiful Body*, ed. Zachary Turpin (Reagan Arts, 2017), p. 104.

> such a noble air of the body, as it would be ridiculous to look for in any hired model of our academies.[98]

This positive attitude toward the male form and its physicality is what Whitman shares with the Grecian spirit. To prove the substance of this claim, we shall briefly look at a few select passages of Whitman's poetry and notice his fascination with the male body, its athleticism, and its movements. It would not be an exaggeration to say that this is the primary force throughout his literature from the 1855 *Leaves of Grass* onward until his death. For instance, in the 1856 edition of *Leave of Grass*, Whitman writes, "I am the teacher of athletes, He that by me spreads a wider breast than my own proves the width of my own." In the 1877 *Democratic Vistas*, aggravated by the fall of his idealism in American democratic potential, Whitman cries,

> Political Democracy, as it exists and practically works in America, with all its threatening evils, supplies a training-school for making grand young men. It is life's gymnasium, not of good only but of all. We try often, though we fall back often. A brave delight, fit for freedom's athletes, fills these arenas, and fully satisfies, out of the action in them, irrespective of success.[99]

In *Specimen Days*, Whitman applauds Hellenic nakedness:

> Probably the whole curriculum of first-class philosophy, beauty, heroism, form, illustrated b the old Hellenic race—

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[98] Johann Joachim Winckelmann, *Reflections on the Painting and Sculpture of the Greeks*, trans. Henry Fuseli (London: Printed for the Translator, and Sold by A. Milan, in the Strand, 1765), pp. 9-10

[99] Walt Whitman, *Democratic Vistas* (New York: The Liberal Arts Press, 1949), pp. 25-26.

> the highest height and deepest depth known to civilization in those departments—came from their natural and religious idea of nakedness.[100]

The point that connect these passages is a strong focus on the athletic male build as the vehical that inculcates sound moral character. Here is where Whitman is most Grecian in his attitude: he belives there to be a direct relaitonship between character and physical fitness. This is the principal claim made in his health and training manual:

> At present there is a mutual recoil between the pure moralist and the teacher of healthy bodily exercises and games—which recoil, in our opinion, should not exist at all. It was not so formerly. The young men of Athens, and other Greek cities, were trained in their bodily, mental, and moral developments and perfections together, and this, as we have before intimated, is the only way, indeed, in which training can be just to the whole man. We repeat, however, that the first requisite to a young man is that he should be well and hardy; and that from such a foundation alone, he will be more apt to become good, upright, friendly, and self-respected.[101]

For Whitman, there is a strong relationship between appearance and ethics. The proverb that you should not judge a book by its cover does not compute with him. In this sense, Whitman shares Johann Gottfried Herder's opinion as espoused in his essay "Is the Beauty of the Body a Herald of the Beauty of the Soul?" Herder, like Whitman, brings up how Grecian of a question this is to ask in the first place. The ancient Greeks, through their statues, forged a set of ideals. That these ideals are materialized in the well formed male body free of drapery, full of strength, athleticism, and naturalistic prowess, is a powerful argument that Whitman was persuaded by.[102]

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[100] Walt Whitman, "A Sun-Bath Nakedness," *Specimen Days*, *Complete Prose Works* (Philadelphia: David McKay, 1892), p. 104.

[101] Walt Whitman, *Manly Health and Training: To Teach the Science of a Sound and Beautiful Body*, ed. Zachary Turpin (Reagan Arts, 2017), p. 29.

4.3 Classicism vs Protestantism

Perhaps the most impressive Greek-inspired statue of the male form rendered by an American artist was Horatio Greenough's depiction of George Washington in the style Phidias' Zeus. This statue, erected in the temple to Zeus at Olympia, when it was standing, was one of the seven ancient wonders of the world. Greenough's imitative statue, completed in 1840, reflects an important point in American history. The statue was made by an American living in Italy; the statue has a Latin inscription on it; yet, the statue depicts the first American president as the head of the Olympian pantheon. This combination of the Greek, Roman, and American worlds is the spirit of an American renaissance. Yet, unlike the renaissance in Italy, where artists were given generous patronage and their creations still stand today as living artifacts to this revival of classical times, *Washington Enthroned* has been relegated to a corner of a storage space. In other words, American classicism has proven, since the late nineteenth century, to have been a mere curiosity and not a serious current that American society has been willing to adopt whole-heartedly. A certain revulsion has always accompanied these classical revivals in America. While there is something in modernism that is incompatible with classical values, as well as anti-European in America, Greenough highlighted at least another current that concerns us greatly. He said,

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[102] See Johann Gottfried Herder, "Is the Beauty of the Body a Herald of the Beauty of the Soul?", *Selected Writings on Aesthetics* (Princeton University Press, 2009), pp. 31–40. See also Vitruvius, *On Architecture*, trans. Frank Granger (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP; London: William Heinemann Ltd, 1955). Virtruvius, famously, compares a well formed made to a well made temple because each are models of symmetry and proportion at the beginning of Book III. Leonardo da Vinci, and other renaissance artists, would sketch models of a "Vitruvian Man" based on ths idea.

> American has, until now, risked the placing before his countrymen a representation of Our Saviour. The strong prejudice, or rather conviction of the Protestant mind has, perhaps, deterred many.[103]

Said in the context of sculpting a statue of Christ, Greenough was underscoring the negative reflex to visual art that has been engrained into Protestantism's iconoclastic history. The Greek cult of male beauty would surely be incompatible with it. What are we supposed to do with the fact that Michelangelo's *David*, a contrapossto statue that is a direct imitation of the Greek *Doryphoros* type, though depicting a Judeo-Christian subject, would never have had the oxygen to be made in America? We must conclude, indeed, that America is categorically different that Europe at least in the respect of the fine arts. Thomas Jefferson, likewise, the founding father who had the most affinity with European classicism, proposed another theory for why the fine arts were to fall short in this country, at least at the time he was writing. Here he is providing advice to an American traveling in Europe:

> Architecture worth great attention. As we double our numbers every 20 years we must double our houses. Besides we build of such perishable materials that one half of our houses must be rebuilt in every space of 20 years. So that in that term, houses are to be built for three fourths of

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[103] Henry T. Tuckerman, *A Memorial of Horatio Greenough* (New York: G.P. Putnam, 1853), p. 33.

> our inhabitants. It is then among the most important arts: and it is desireable to introduce taste into an art which shews so much. Painting, statuary. Too expensive for the state of wealth among us. It would be useless therefore and preposterous for us to endeavor to make ourselves connoisseurs in those arts. They are worth seeing, but not studying.[104]

In some sense, Jefferson's comment is indicative of this same Protestant suspicion of the fine arts as uneconomical and impracticable. In his 1748 essay, "Essay to a Young Tradesman," Benajmin Franklin said, "Remember time is money."[105] The impractical nature of statue and painting was even adopted to some degree by Whitman who wrote in his *Democratic Vistas* that,

> Painting, sculpture, and the dramatic theatre, it would seem, no longer play an indispensable or even important part in the workings and mediumship of intellect, utility, or even high esthetics. Architecture remains, doubtless with capacities, and a real future. Then music, the combiner, nothing more spiritual, nothing more sensuous, a god, yet completely human, advances, prevails, holds highest place; supplying it certain wants and quarters what nothing else could supply. Yet in the civilization of to-day it is undeniable that, over the arts, literature dominates, serves beyond all—shapes the character of church and school—or,

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[104] *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, vol. 13, ed. Julian P. Boyd (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1956), pp. 262–264.

[105] *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin,* vol. 3, ed. Leonard W. Labaree (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961), pp. 304–308.

> at any rate, is capable of doing so. Including the literature of sciences, its scope is indeed unparallel'd.[106]

Sculpture and painting are, it need not be said, not the focus of the American economy. Whitman understood that American excemptionalism was defined by Nature, the landscapes themselves, and not necessarily imitating things in stone or fresco. With that said, there is an impressive fresco of Washington, the *Apotheosis of Washginton*, painted by the Italian painter Constantino Brumidi atop the Capitol building dome in 1865—defying Jefferson's, and Whitman's, claims. Yet, the ability for this type of art to multiply and achieve fluency among the general population has never taken off. The Protestant and anti-monarchical basis of America's founding are two ingredients that are rather incompatible with the fine arts. Whitman, desperate to see classical male beauty incarnate in this country, turned to the art of poetry, the art of letters being the most formative to a people based in the Reformation and the importance of reading scripture firsthand, to funnel his idealism.

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[106] Walt Whitman, *Democratic Vistas* (New York: The Liberal Arts Press, 1949), p. 7.

CONCLUSION

This work of literary criticism has been an attempt to highlight the significance of two American poets incorporating imagery of classical male beauty into their literature. What initially started as a study into the visual arts in America more broadly slowly morphed into a study of the male form and the aesthetics of physicality in particular. Melville and Whitman's literature stands out in American letters because of its sympathetic attention to classical male beauty. It makes sense, reasonably, that these two writers would render their imagery of the male form in a classical guise. The classical tradition is the tradition that has done the most to legitimate and give definition to male beauty. It is a curious phenomenon for why this tradition has been abandoned in American art and, ultimately, reflects the downstream effects of America's strained separation from Europe as well as the schism between Protestantism and Catholicism.

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